

# Young Voices

ANTHOLOGY *of* STUDENT WORK



New York State Summer  
Young Writers Institute

2013

# The New York State Summer Young Writers Institute

What you hold in your hands are the poems and stories – true and imagined – that the students of the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute produced during ten crazily inventive days last July, interspersed with photos and student comments that help to chronicle the sights and emotions of our annual writing residency.



In its sixteenth year, the Young Writers Institute is held at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, NY, so that our students can take advantage of the New York State Summer Writers Institute, directed by Robert Boyers, which convenes on the Skidmore campus for the entire month. Having the opportunity to work on their own writing in three classes each day, hear accomplished writers in late-afternoon craft sessions or at packed evening readings, and then try out their own works-in-progress during late-night reading sessions in the residence hall means that our high school writers are thoroughly immersed in the writing life for every waking hour. And here's what we have learned to expect: they love it.

These young writers are unique in any number of disparate ways, but they all share a devotion to writing. That common interest creates almost instantaneous bonding when they meet each other, but it also encourages them to revel in the writing atmosphere of

our intensive workshop. More than one hundred applicants send original writing samples each April, and we choose the forty best writers to attend the Young Writers Institute. That ability to be selective pays off for us. Year after year, we offer these students respect and recognition for what they have already achieved, and in return we receive not only a committed, attentive group of students but also the dramatic, funny, moving, troubling, and remarkable creative pieces in this anthology. It was our pleasure to watch as these pieces unfolded during our Summer 2013 Workshop, and it's your pleasure to discover them here.

William Patrick

Director  
New York State Summer  
Young Writers Institute

NEW YORK STATE  WRITERS INSTITUTE  
State University of New York

SKIDMORE  
C O L L E G E

## Summer 2013 Faculty



**KATHLEEN AGUERO'S** latest book is *After That* (Tiger Bark Books). Her other poetry collections include *Investigations: The Mystery of the Girl Sleuth* (Cervena Barva Press), *Daughter Of* (Cedar Hill Books), *The Real Weather* (Hanging Loose), and *Thirsty Day* (Alice James Books). She has also co-edited three volumes of multicultural literature for the University of Georgia Press (*A Gift of Tongues*, *An Ear to the Ground*, and *Daily Fare*) and is consulting poetry editor of *Solstice* literary magazine. She teaches in the low-residency M.F.A. program at Pine Manor College.



**LIZA FRENETTE** is an assistant editor at the monthly magazine, *NYSUT United*, where she writes features, human interest stories, articles about workers' rights, and environmental education. She has won the Mary Heaton Vorse award three times, the highest writing award from the Metro Labor Communications Council of New York City. In 2012, she won the highest national writing award from the American Federation of Teachers for a feature story. Frenette is the author of three novels for middle-grade children, *Soft Shoulders*, *Dangerous Falls Ahead*, and *Dead End*.



**ELAINE HANDLEY** is a professor of writing and literature at SUNY Empire State College. She is an award-winning poet and is completing a novel. Her most recent book of poetry, written in collaboration, is *Tear of the Clouds*, published in 2011 by RA Press. In 2011 she was the recipient of the SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching.



**RICHARD HOFFMAN** is author of *Half the House: A Memoir*, and the poetry collections, *Without Paradise*, *Gold Star Road*, winner of the 2006 Barrow Street Press Poetry Prize and the 2008 Sheila Motton Award from the New England Poetry Club, and his latest, *Emblem*. A fiction writer as well, his *Interference & Other Stories* was published in 2009. His work has appeared in *Harvard Review*, *Hudson Review*, *Literary Review*, *Poetry*, *Witness* and other magazines. His most recent book is the memoir, *Love & Fury*. He is Senior Writer-in-Residence at Emerson College.



**BOB MINER** worked for *Newsweek* and has written for the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Village Voice*, *Esquire*, and others. He has published two novels, *Exes* and *Mother's Day*, and is finishing up the third novel in this series, *Father, Son and Holy Ghost*, as well as writing nonfiction about Istanbul, Turkey. Since 1980 he has taught writing for the University at Albany, Empire State College, Skidmore College, Syracuse University, Siena College, and the College of St. Rose.



**WILLIAM B. PATRICK** is the founder and director of the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute. His most recent book is *The Call of Nursing: Voices from the Front Lines of Health Care*. He is also the author of *Saving Troy: A Year with Firefighters and Paramedics in a Battered City*; *Roxa*, an award-winning novel; and *We Didn't Come Here for This*, a memoir in poetry, among several other books. Mr. Patrick is currently on the faculty of Fairfield University's MFA Program in Creative Writing, and acquisitions editor for Hudson Whitman/Excelsior College Press.

# Forget

By MAGGIE AKINS

Old plucked at the piano and tinkering notes waltzed lazily from the wooden box. She had forgotten her music, and sight was a sense of the past. Old turned on the little pink lamp more out of habit than necessity. She felt the keys, searching for familiar indentations to remind her of where to find middle C. It eluded her, playing hide and seek. Old searched frantically, becoming more unnerved by her inability to play such a basic note. Such troubles often threw her into fits, nowadays. Old whimpered, as would a dog warning his master of a dangerous intruder, ears back, tail tucked. She cried, her gnarled fingers clutching the piano's frame, tears running through the crinkles of her useless eyes.

Old had forgotten her life as a Broadway pianist and her stint as a harmonica player for a bar in New Orleans. She'd left behind her husband while inevitable years washed away the memory of his prickled scruff and favorite aqua socks from Old's mind. She had forgotten going steady with Mr. BlueEyes, being pressured to go all the way at the drive-in movie. Her first sleepover, where she stayed up all night for fear that the other girls would leave, was lost in time. She would never remember trying her first sip of Bourbon from the confines of a paper bag and throwing up in a nearby trash bin, ignoring the jeers from the neighborhood boys. Old would also forget to try to remember. She would lose it all.

Young placed a hand on Old's shoulder. She nearly toppled off of the piano bench, but Young caught her. The two sat down. Old played a melody, scattered and lost, but Young found it beautiful. She accompanied her, swirling notes in and out of Old's brokenness, accenting the offset rhythm with a jazzy tone. Young tried, wanting nothing more than Old to leap in and begin a rendition of some Louisiana tune, but the melody stopped. She was done. A new episode of Jeopardy was on, and the host's voice never failed to catch Old's ears. She sat

on the bench, motionless, and listened to the answers being questioned from the crackling TV.

"This is the fabled land where Dorothy met the scarecrow and found the wizard."

Ding.

"What is Oz?"

Young listened to the noise as she washed her dishes, little white plates with pink flowers dancing along the edge. Her heart sank. She wanted so desperately to be back in her own Oz with Old. She thought their yellow brick road was infinite, but time had proved to be a worthy adversary, whisking Old away from her into the darker land of Oz.

"Correct! And that is 200 points to you, Jeanine!" Alex Trebek said from the TV. The noise snapped Young back into her reality. She always kept the game show on at two o'clock. It was a routine she practiced with Old and the reruns proved to be useful dishwashing music. The plates were dried and neatly placed back in their musty shelves. Young sat on her floral couch, took the

hospital bills into her hands and for a moment, she let the thin, waxy papers rest against her forehead. Maybe, if she wanted it badly enough, the hospital would feel how much love Young had for Old and they would find a cure for deterioration. Were they hoarding the miracles—stashed in a vault somewhere, safe and sound, waiting for the wealthy and privileged? Old deserved a miracle. Old needed a miracle. Perhaps Old was watching Jeopardy in that sterilized hospital room right now. It was a pleasant thought. Young let her mind rest, assured that the game show was holding Old above the water, keeping her from sinking down and down. The winner was announced, and the credits rolled, superimposed on the moving images of losers forcibly shaking the hand of the champion. The phone rang. The hospital had called and Young listened. She hung up. Young pushed the piano bench under the splintering keys, folded up the yellowing music, and turned off the little pink light. ■



"Because of this program, I have definitely grown as a writer. I enjoyed getting meaningful constructive criticism on my work. Sometimes that can be extremely difficult, because I have a hard time finding people who enjoy writing as much as I do."

— Sarah Bailey

# Untitled

By SARAH BAILEY

My father has smoked since before I was born. The older I become, the more he reveals his smoker's history to me. About how when he was fifteen, he would steal change from his father's ashtray and go buy a pack of cigarettes. Tales of him cutting class to read books and smoke behind the library.

But the act of my father smoking is something that I was not really shown, as a child. It was a rule that my mother held tightly, in the days when my parents still lived together. *Do not smoke in front of the children.* And even though my father has not lived with me since I was three, he still held that law above all

others. One night, about a month before I turned thirteen, for whatever reason, the ruling was discarded.

It was May, and it was humid. I'd been dragging around the writer's notebook that was part of a weird English assignment, drawing scenes in colored pen because I couldn't decide what to write. On an impulse I'd followed my father out onto this little slab of concrete outside the back door of his apartment, fully expecting to be told to go back inside. Instead, he stayed silent, took a cigarette out of his pack of Newports, the only brand I'd ever seen him smoke, and lit it. The end glowed

bright orange in the dim twilight. We sat across from each other in green plastic chairs, me with my entire body curled into the chair, my head on my knees, the notebook clutched tightly. He was leaning back easily.

I held the moments I had alone with my father precious, and so I let the silence continue, reveling in it. Finally my father broke the silence, telling me something that still catches me off guard when I think about it.

"I don't know what happened between your mother and I."

Before those words my parents' divorce and separation had seemed very simple to me. There was no "He said, she said" because my father had never talked about those types of things. All I had ever heard was my mother's side of the story. I probably sound naïve when I say that. I'd never seen that there are two sides to every story. That is the truth though. As a child, all I'd ever heard was my mother's side. And other than that, all I had were my memories. Yelling, and screaming. I never thought to ask my father his opinion on the matter. I didn't question the words of my mother because I trusted her to tell me the truth. I didn't question my memories because they gave me a sense that I actually knew what was going on. But what if, as a child, I had dared to question the words I was fed? Would I have had a better relationship with my father, for asking him what his side was? For asking him why he left?

After saying his piece, my father was silent. And I didn't utter a sound. I just sat there, trying to absorb what had just happened. The cigarette was still between us, dangling from his fingers. A burning remnant of my childhood. After a few minutes he stood up, put out his cigarette in the ashtray, and went back inside. I quickly trailed after him, eager to be back inside, in the real world—a running air conditioner, the dripping of the sink, the chatter of the television. After the crushing silence, it was refreshing to be around so much noise. ■



"I had an incredible time at the Institute this summer. Being able to spend some time with people who are so like me was one of the best parts. It not only helped me become a better writer, but it helped me want to become better. I worked with experienced people, both faculty and other students. I was pushed out of my comfort zone, but that gave me even more ideas for the future. I can't wait to see all of our work published in the anthology."

— Marissa Block

# The Possibility of Saving the World

By EMMA BECKER

“I want you to save the world.” This was how my A.P. World History teacher had decided to end the year. Instead of allowing us time to breathe after our test we had quickly plunged into a large and all-consuming project. Of course, along with this incredibly ambiguous statement we were given rubrics and explanations; we were to form groups, pick a global issue, propose a viable solution to it, and fundraise.

But that initial statement still hung in my head, “save the world.” How could I, Emma Becker of Nowhere, Massachusetts, possibly leap to the forefront of world-saving efforts? Could the world even be saved? It was barely a month after the Boston Marathon bombing and maybe the world was no longer so straightforward.

Even as the assignment was given, I could look around and see the wave of “Boston Strong” paraphernalia floating on shirts, like mirages. It had all been so unreal, I still sometimes thought it was a figment of my imagination. I had gone through stages of anger, of acceptance, of sadness. It made me mad that someone had ruined this spectacle of human achievement. People had trained and dreamed of that moment and it was taken away from them. It had happened, and sometimes I tried to move past that. And then other times I would remember the incredible sadness that accompanied the death of that eight-year-old, in particular, and our feelings of safety in general.

I formed a group of three. We were smaller than the average group and we were addressing global poverty, in no way a simple issue. Our solution was decided to be microfinance, one of the most human things with the most off-putting, sleep-inducing name. As I researched I became more and more enthused about it, especially the organization we had chosen to partner with, Kiva.

Kiva is a website where individuals make microfinance loans to applicants in developing regions, in order to help them improve their socioeconomic sta-

tus. My group, understanding how boring even that sentence was, declined to focus on the numbers, despite how impressive they were, and instead chose to focus on those people who so desperately needed the loans.

We would go into a class with a picture, Crisley from Santo Domingo or Peter from Kenya, and request that the class raise a goal of \$25. This was the minimum microloan that could be made. We didn’t know what we were hoping for. People were raw. Our teacher was continually warning us of the apathy of the student body, but we maintained a hope that we could potentially help people.

The donations started with a trickle but steadily began to accumulate. As I visited more and more classrooms I began to recognize people sitting among the Boston Strong mirage, who would make a point to give money each time I came into a new classroom with a new loan applicant.

In the background of our fundraising was the gradual amassing of a memorial around the bombing site. There were the hundreds of running shoes tied to the partitions, the posters and the hats, the flags and the teddy bears. A member of a nearby church had committed suicide in response to the bombings a day before they caught the fuckers. Our friends were crying and we didn’t know how to help them. So within my group we went full force for the fundraising, choosing to focus on something different, something positive.

When we made our first \$25 loan to Claudia in Nicaragua the pride and empowerment within our little group was palpable. We had done something. We had helped Claudia send her children to school, and when she paid back our loan we would be able to help another person, and another. We had done something. The numbers were there. Five percent of the people who received microfinance loans will get out of poverty this year and Claudia might be one of them.

Out of a school of 1,500 kids we raised an astounding \$530 for microloans, with eight other groups also campaigning for world issues. Overall we managed to raise \$2,000 for various solutions.

As we were basking in their stories, more local inspirations were coming out. There were the runners who finished their marathon and ran straight to the hospital to donate blood, and the people who immediately ran towards the explosions and the residents who offered up their homes and their condolences to those who sat shell-shocked and blood-spattered on the sidewalks.

By the end of our fundraiser we were able to make 22 microloans, help 22 people. I was so incredibly proud of our school for caring, for helping, for making a difference in these peoples’ lives. The numbers were there. At least one of these people would rise above the poverty line. The rest would indubitably rise a few socioeconomic levels. We were strong, and powerful, and capable and maybe making a difference in the world. Perhaps the world could be saved, if not in the most straightforward way. ■

“The New York State Summer Young Writers Institute was such a valuable experience. It exposed me to independence, to life as a writer, and to so many great people who shared my interests. I have made so many memories as a result of my time here, and I am confident that I will go home a better writer because of all that. I have learned a lot from my teachers and peers.”

— Jenna Columbia

# Starch Contrast: The Root of My Problems

By PORSHIA BLANKENSHIP

Everyone has their *thing*  
That one thing that sets them apart;  
Their style, personality, or attitude

Me?  
I don't.

I am a potato.  
No, really, don't laugh.  
I am a potato.

Underappreciated  
Not recognized for everything I am,  
Only everything I'm *not*.

*You're not a real vegetable*, I'm told  
Though I do everything a 'real vegetable' can.  
I have vitamins, minerals.  
I feed the hungry, the poor.  
I may be a little different,  
But aren't we all?

*You're just a root*, I'm told  
But there's more to me than that.  
If you were to look beyond my growth, beyond my appearance  
And into the starchy goodness inside  
You would see everything I am  
You would see all the proteins and acids that make me  
And solely me  
You would see how alike we can be.



“It was a great experience for me to be around other writers with whom I could discuss the writing process. We could swap stories and critique each other's work and I think it was helpful when the critique came from peers who understand how it feels to be a teenager and a writer at the same time.”

— Claire Factor



# *confessions*

By **MARISSA BLOCK**

self-portrait with hair frizzing out to the clouds,  
unused red lipstick in the back of a drawer,  
worn-once dress with neither tatters nor tears, but memories stowed in the closet  
somewhere.

self-portrait of friend's letter tacked to the wall,  
with squeezing in jeans to be a size down, both done in vain—  
with new jeans and new friends that I'll donate to others when I grow them out.

self-portrait with mother, with brother, with father, familial sense in captain's seat,  
seething from wordy bombs of slaps and "I hate yous!"  
set off and detonated back in the car.

self-portrait with paintbrush and easel in hand, shaping lines of delusion to flatter my face,  
obliterating zits and frown lines galore, but keeping my mouth,  
in case I'm courageous, to utter the truth of the too-pretty face.

self-portrait with dance shoes still on the floor,  
yesterday's clothing options hanging below—  
rejected, unused like the leftover doll, a keepsake of me when my brain was still small.

self-portrait with trees staring in through the window,  
green eyes stare coldly, frozen in moisture,  
glistening raindrops showing the past, it was dreary and dark, but the sun is out now.

and there is my bed, where I dream of ascending far into space  
to escape the expected of all of us people  
the only preconditions insurance can cover.

self-portrait with guilt of a visit forgotten,  
with worry to dare not make them love me,  
with jealousy turning my veins dark green, preconditions that still scare the hell out of  
me.

self-portrait reveals too much of my heart,  
rip this muscle from my sleeve, smuggle it back into my shirt  
goodbye, I must leave now, but I'll see you next time, with my feelings tucked away,  
sleeping soundly from your sight.



# The Keys

By RACHEL BRITTON

A silent fanfare. Only he could hear it.

His hands trembled as if the continuous vibration of a bass note climbed up and down his bones searching for a companion. They removed the cover, then shook against his prickly, white scalp. With his thin eyes closing, he breathed in the wooden equivalent of the scent of old books, musty and faintly reminiscent of aged cologne. The keys had yellowed since he last sat at the piano, but he, not able to see color, could only tell that they were darkened. Everything was monotone. Black and white.

A breeze danced between the whimsical, diaphanous curtains through the tall, open window. It chilled the bare skin where he had rolled up his sleeves. He yearned to shut it, but it was too hard. His knee was still throbbing from the surgery. He defiantly refused to take the pain medication. He would rather fight the ache. Already, he fought the tremor in his large hands, the arthritis in his round knuckles, and the splintering of his glass heart.

Even though the war had long been over, the resonance of whizzing bullets and the crack of explosives played like an undying symphony in his mind, manifesting unexpectedly every so often. Smoke from the fireplace invaded his senses, the Kublai Khan of scents. He froze, fingertips barely lingering on the keys. A shot. Searing pain. But he carried on and climbed up toward his friend who lay, strung across the rocks like a ragdoll, on the cliffs.

He could hear the sadness of the bassoon.

He pressed down a key. The note sang in the silence, sharp at first and then wavering into nothing. Like this note, he was alone. Except for the piano, the house was empty. It was his final chance to say farewell to the ebony grand before the new owners came.

Agnes. He drew out a shiny, golden pocket-watch from his jacket and opened its case to gaze at her photograph. Although he could no longer see the mahogany brown of her burnished,

glossy hair and the twinkle in her wide, hazel eyes when she smiled crookedly with mischief, the picture helped him to remember. As a handsome young man, he'd chased her through the house, laughing, and when he'd caught her, his grip around her tiny waist would be so gentle that it must have felt like air. She was delicate and pale-skinned, like a porcelain doll, though her will was strong. His Agnes.

When he was drafted into the war, she'd been pregnant. She'd cried. The vision of her swollen, reddened face and quivering shoulders was singed into his memory as if tattooed unwillingly and she had pleaded with him not to go. He'd had no choice.

He could hear the heartache of the violin.

She wrote him weekly with news of the pregnancy, how well the baby was doing. Her letters were always spritzed with the lavender perfume she wore. Distinctly, he remembered sitting in the bunker, caked in dirt and dried blood, and inhaling the scent until he felt intoxicated. The last letter was dated the day before the baby was due.

That was the letter that was tucked, crumpled, in his pocket when he felt the bullet that cunningly entered the back of his shoulder, the one in his knee, and the collision of his head against the earth. A deafening crack. He was sent, unconscious, along a string of hospitals: Germany, then D.C., then New York. It was in New York, his frail body confined to a hospital bed, that reality came crashing down like a fighter pilot on fire. He'd been hit. He'd lost consciousness. There was no feeling in his right leg and he couldn't sit up. The nurse told him he was on pain medication. Before closing his eyes to fall back into a brilliant slumber where there was

nothing but white and a colorless stream eroding its way through the void, he let tears escape the prison of his eyes, leaking through the metal bars. He could still hear the hiss of the flow. Something was missing. Agnes.

Now, the notes of the haunting melody of Ravel's "Pavane Pour Une Infante Defunte" hung on the humidity that saturated the air and dripped onto his spotted forehead in salty beads. Fifty-eight years ago, he was twenty-four with a baby on the way and a beautiful wife. He was energetic and happy. She, however, had been fretting about the guns and the trenches and the explosives. To think, she was worried about him dying.

"Where did the time go, Aggie?" His voice was hoarse, like a cough was eternally clutching to his throat as if falling

"This program opened my eyes to how much I love to write. I thought I might get tired of writing for ten days straight, but I had more and more fun as every day went by. Everyone was so welcoming, and I made all kinds of friends who helped me a lot. I always knew that I liked to write, but The New York State Summer Young Writers Institute showed me just how much."

— Abbey Frederick

from a never-ending cliff. He draped a hand over the cool, black wood and breathed in the summer air. Outside the window, the sky was grey; not yet the black of night nor the white of day.

He could hear the sobs of the cello.

His free hand pulled the cover back over the disintegrating keys and reached for his cane that leaned against the side of the piano. Staggering, he tottered unevenly across the creaking floorboards and disappeared like a misty ghost through the threshold.

Resting on the keys was the smudged and tattered photograph of Agnes. ■

# Nut

By TARA CICIC

“How long do you think it will be before we can go home?” she asked.

“I don’t know, but I have a feeling that the old boy still has a few days left in him,” he replied.

It was a queer and sultry day with a heat so oppressive, thick, and heavy that it bent the atmosphere to its will. Camilla continued to sip her tea, pressing the cool exterior of the glass to her forehead and letting out gentle and pitiful sighs. The air quivered before her.

“Do you want to make a bet? You know, on the old boy,” he asked.

“Charles, I can’t talk. I’m too weak,” Camilla said. She had always been one of those waifish blonde girls that were in high demand for reasons unknown. She was never truly ill, but the idea of it seemed to linger about her. She rarely

“Being one of the few writers where I’m from, it was a good feeling to be surrounded by so many people who are as intense about writing as I am.”

— Zach Eydenberg

had anything nice to say, and if she did then it was always about herself.

Again they were silent, for a long stretch of time. The sun began to dip slowly into the Earth and anticipation for the frigid desert night rose in Charles’ heart. A figure appeared somewhere in the distance, dressed all in white, its movements disjointed in the simmering air. It was one of the native men who had accompanied them.

“Pardon me,” he said. “But the Professor wants to see you.”

“Did he say why?” Charles asked.

Charles began to rise from his lounge chair. Camilla grabbed her brother’s arm and said, with a strange combination of pleading and sighing, “Charlie, must we really go?”

He did not reply, only strode forward with the whisper of his sister’s fingertips still on his forearm. He could

hear her fumbling behind him, letting out a soft curse as she searched for her slippers and complained of the sand.

The professor’s tent was not far, but tent was an awfully humble word for such a structure. Its floor was covered with Persian carpets and it was outfitted with almost all of the best commodities. The Professor could not have cared much, however, for he was dying. For days now he had been wasting away in his bed, no longer the brutish man of temerity who liked to bring necklaces and bracelets back from the tombs and divvy them up amongst his dinner guests, encouraging them to pull on the artifacts with as much force as possible until they broke so that they could marvel at their incredible craftsmanship. How difficult it was to break them, he would cry, as the jewelry popped all around him and beads littered the room.

It had all happened very suddenly, the sickness, soon after he had entered that mysterious tomb, belonging to a Pharaoh long gone. Perhaps he should have heeded the warnings so carefully marked upon its walls.

Camilla and Charles entered the structure, which smelled of illness. He had never liked them very much, those two spoiled children, but he had taken them along with him as a favor to their parents, to let them see a bit of the world so that perhaps they would no longer feel the need to be so rebellious.

He had been having magnificent hallucinations all day, of scarabs flitting about the room and buzzing near his ears, of Ra’s powerful eyes blinking before him. He saw Sekhmet’s river of blood coursing through the tent, rising steeply and staining his bed.

“They that shall break the seal of this tomb shall meet death by a disease that no doctor can diagnose,” he whispered. “That is what it said.”

“Those are all old tales,” Charles laughed.

By now the sun was dropping quickly into the sand and a hush fell over the land. Lamps and torches were lit all along the camp site.

“I would run, if I were you,” the old man said.

Camilla sighed.

“Isn’t there a curse that goes something like ‘a donkey shall violate him, a donkey shall violate his wife,’” Charles said, and snorted a bit as he grabbed a quill from the professor’s desk and ran it along his sister’s cheek. She flinched and smacked his hand.

The professor’s sallow face fell. They were all doomed. Their ends were ineluctable. But he did not care much for the children.

It was then that he had another vision. The canvas was no longer occluding the night’s sky. He could see through it. There she was, the goddess Nut, wearing a dress of stars. She was very beautiful, he thought. And then her mouth began to gape. She unhinged her jaws and slowly she began to devour the sun. It was hideous and grotesque and the professor began to scream in his febrile state. The flaming bulge traveled down her throat and he saw it rest in her belly, radiating light before it was quickly extinguished. The goddess arched her back and night fell upon the Earth.

And what was that now? It was Shu, a man in a headdress with feathers, his hands spread across the sky and his shoulders quivering as he held up the night so that it would not touch the land. But how he struggled! How he trembled. His face glistened in the light of the stars and when he touched them, those burning blots, they singed his skin and he darted his fingers away. The sky undulated. He lost his grip, and the professor saw the sky begin to fall. It was the end, he knew.

Camilla and Charles gasped as the withered man took a final breath. It was over now, they knew. They could go home, away from this cursed and barren land.

Outside the lights went out one by one, as if an invisible creature was extinguishing them. Beneath them the ground began to rumble. A scream rang out across the night. ■

# Blind Girls and Dolls

By JENNA COLUMBIA

A girl

With large, unseeing eyes

A woman's hand

Reaching out

Cupping her chin,

Perhaps to illuminate the shadows,

Or maybe simply to let the girl know she is there

Dolls hanging from clotheslines

By their plastic hair

And tattered dresses fluttering

In warm summer breezes

The woman looks at the girl and then the dolls,

Comparing their blank stares



“Spending late nights at the Case Center, finishing “night writing” with other students, was great. I love being surrounded by people my age who stayed up late, writing, and really enjoyed it. The feedback from students at late-night readings in the dorm was very beneficial. Overall, a great experience—I was glad to be part of it.”

— Shaina Gormley

# Who was Audrey to you?

By CLAIRE DWYER

*From the office of Dr. Mason  
Case Histories: Audrey*

1. She always sparkled with gold and silver. Audrey was pretty. Beautiful. Astonishing. Drop dead gorgeous. And crazy. One of those people who change their hair all the time, but never anything else. Especially her smile, Audrey kept her weird smile that tilted a little bit more to the right than to the left, and exposed her slightly crooked teeth at the front of her mouth, which sometimes had braces and sometimes didn't. She said, well, she *said* that the orthodontist gave up. And after she said that her crooked smile would creep up on me again and I'd know she was lying.

2. Kind, there wasn't a second I saw her stop being kind. Not that everyone else was kind to Audrey. She was—a unique person. And no one understood that but me. The birthmark on the side of her face was in the shape of a star. I think that's what Audrey was, a real...

3. Person, if you ask me. She was and still is the only human being I know that never stopped being a real person. And that she left us in the way that she left us should be a real warning to everyone. They told her she was worthless. I loved her more than the world itself. That's the part that makes me want to give up as well, fuck life. If my daughter, the most tolerant person I know, if she couldn't stand it, then no one can.

4. Well, she was fine. A good kid. Too small. Never, never good at playing games, or anything. I don't think she was really smart. There was this one time when we were kids at Disneyland, running around all over the place. We were maybe 12, I guess. She wouldn't stop nagging me about this one stuffed bear that she saw. It was a really awful looking bear sitting on the shelf—missing an eye and all. Also, someone had dropped it in a puddle of dirt.

1. Also, she probably had 365 different outfits at least. I never saw her wear the same thing twice in the five years that I knew her. When I first saw her, she was dressed up as a Japanese geisha. The next day, it was a lacy dress that barely covered her body. The rest of that school week consisted of a male soldier in camouflage, a doctor in scrubs, and pajamas. I knew I'd found my partner in crime. Now I didn't have to worry when I wanted to wear boy's clothes to school. What she was wearing was way weirder. She made me feel accepted. I won't find a friend like that ever again.

5. Oh, wow, I feel compelled to say really, really hot. Not that I ever told her that. Should I have? She didn't love me, she spat at me in the hallways, almost. I think she thought I was one of *those* guys, those awful, in your face guys that won't leave any of the hot girls alone. I don't know why she let that Miller kid get to her. So what she had a purple blotch on her face? Her curves made up for it—now *they* were sexy.

3. I don't know, but that might be an option. I stopped living the very first second I saw her lifeless. My feet and back, my arms and legs, they all disappeared from my consciousness and I felt numb to the world except for my throbbing heart.

6. Very, very wonderful, and perhaps brilliant. Not a particularly easy child to identify with though, for other children I mean. And inventive, too. She must have been a gymnast or skier or something, as she always had broken bones. Sometimes, she would break both of her arms at the same time. To write, she'd buy a bendy pencil, insert it in her cast next to her pointer finger, hold the pencil steady with her thumb and pointer finger and begin to write. She tried, in vain, to help others with their schoolwork because she knew all of it of course, but others spat in her face and treated her like scum all because of that stupid birthmark on her face. She

got pretty quiet because they wouldn't stop. I wanted to intervene. I had the authority. I didn't. Is it my fault?

7. Audrey was a biker, in the truest sense of the word. All day, all night, during lunch from school, nothing could get her off the seat of that bike. Except for rocks missed in the dark. And hills whose heights were misjudged. And road kill. She broke both arms three times, her right leg once, her nose, her clavicle, her foot, and three ribs. I told her she couldn't ride until she got her cast off, once. It was a particularly bad break of her left arm, in that the arm was in a full cast and the surgery had resulted in burning, searing pain that never truly went away. I called to check on her, four or five days after the surgery, and she sounded just fine until I heard the whooshing sound of air in the background of my call. I scolded her severely, told her to hang up the phone immediately, get off the bike, and walk home, but no sooner had I finished my sentence that I heard a bang and a loud crunch. She'd broken her other arm.

8. I'm gay, and Audrey's known me her entire life. I'm forty-nine, and three years apart from her mother. I was the youngest of the three. So, I don't have problems with being gay or anything, that's not why I'm telling you. I'm telling you because she liked to call me up and we'd discuss our boyfriends together. It was sort of a tradition. We did it even before she was old enough to have a boyfriend, and she'd make one up. It was fun then. I'd tell her stories about my boyfriend's funny quirks, and she'd tell me about her fake boyfriend, named Todd or Jimmy or John, and we'd laugh. It only got scary when she was around 14 years old. She asked me if it was usual for 14 year old kids to have sex. When I asked her what she'd seen, she wouldn't tell me except that it had been two kids in the bathroom and they'd been "doing it." She soon became fascinated with getting a boyfriend her-

*continued on page 12*

self. My sweet, innocent, kind niece, who would stop at nothing to weed an entire football field if someone asked her politely, had no idea what boys even were, so she couldn't possibly know that they were complete bastards most of the time.

9. I didn't really know Audrey, except that I saw her around the hospital a lot when she'd break her various limbs. We'd sneak into each other's rooms, eat ice cream, and watch movies together until one of the nurses kicked one or the other of us back to where we were supposed to be. The only bad part for me was that she'd get to leave and I'd have to stay. I *always* had to stay. The best day ever was one time when she came back to visit me right after she'd been discharged. She was propping her broken leg up on some pillows and a chair by my bed when a nurse came in to check my vitals. The nurse smirked when she saw Audrey there, asked her if she'd broken something else already and remarked that it had been a particularly long stretch of time this time around. I giggled. I'll take any humor I can get, even if it isn't funny.

1. Yah, that Miller kid, I know. That's all you people care about; it's what you want to hear. Damion Miller was the guy she liked. That's all. It was stupid, simple. Pretty much everyone was getting a boyfriend, and she wanted one too. And Damion *was* cute.

2. Star. You know I just can't, can't do it. Can't imagine why Audrey would do something like this to herself. I can't see, with all of the wonderful things in her life, with her complete innocence, all the love and support from her stable-minded, brave family members, what would compel her to, to...

I'm not going to say it. I don't want to talk to you anymore. I don't like your questions.

4. So she got her way and she paid for the bear, and she left extra money in

the tip jar of the guy that kept it. She said that it was for keeping the bear so long, even though it made his crappy little store look even crappier. Ok, maybe that's not exactly how she said it. Anyways, it made no sense to me.

When they told me she died? I don't know, playing Minecraft. Blowing up cows. I stopped and listened though. Do you promise not to tell anyone something?

I cried.

Just once, and only sort of if you know what I mean. We were at the beach, on a class field trip to celebrate the end of the school year. I set my towel next to hers in the sand and spent the night playing stupid games with the other guys on the beach all the while staring at her and how beautiful she was. We were younger then. When it got dark I went to sit next to her. She knew I'd set my towel there, and was waiting for me. She said "good, it's dark so you can't see my birthmark", and then she kissed me.

6. Yes, and thank you. She was a wonderful girl. I'll miss her. We'll all miss her.

7. Oh of course they did. It's sort of a requirement, when a patient gets discharged. It's just, we knew Audrey wouldn't be coming back, so we did

something extra special. A golden cast. All her doctors signed it. On the front desk, by the place where she used to stand making miserable new patients laugh.

9. By next November I'll be dead. Maybe I'll see her. Maybe not. I don't think there's a God, but certainly there's a heaven.

1. Damion pushed her. Hard. Against the concrete floor behind the gym. I'm pretty sure she broke something again, but she didn't say. All she did was ask him out, and he called her a stupid ugly bitch and pushed her violently. Not that she cared about physical pain much anymore. I think the worst part was that he called her a bitch. And then just left.

Outwardly, fine I guess. She said good bye to me and gave me a hug, just like normal. She got the homework assignments she missed because of physical therapy, just like normal. And then she went home and died. Just like that.

8. When she was a baby, I held her limp body in my arms and supported her neck with my hands. When she was sixteen, I helped her father lift her coffin into the ground.



"Being here has shown me that I'm not alone in my love for writing and unique ways of thinking. This week has shown me that there is a place and a community where I can fit in."

— Porshia Blankenship

# Keys

By ELSA EVANS-KUMMER

She didn't want to talk to him. In her whole life Alli had never heard of anything so outrageous!

"You want me, to let you stay with me? Really Henry!?" He had come to her without a call, without warning and he had asked her if he could go to their house from which, she had scrupulously reminded him, he had been absent for over a year.

"No, absolutely not. You cannot barge into my life and expect me to take you back. What if I told you I was married, huh?"

"Don't be ridiculous Alli" he said nonchalantly as he walked around her Prius and got in the driver's side, leaving her speechless with anger.

"Keys," he asked leaning over and sticking his hand out of the passenger's side window. Alli glared at his hand, bent over to look through the window at his face and shook her head. She looked awed at his arrogance and causality. She stood up straight, looked at the sky, sighed, then walked around the car to the driver's side. She looked in the window, countering the sarcastic smirk with a burning glare.

"Get. Out. Of. My. Car," Alli said, her voice shaking as she struggled to keep her temper. Henry looked up and laughed. He leaned back in the seat, threw his head back and laughed. His hands, which were nonchalantly resting on the wheel fell to his stomach. *Maniac. He needed to get out of the car now. Why is he laughing!* Alli's hands clenched and she tensed her legs, as if to keep her anger contained.

"Get out, Henry. I'm serious. Get out," she said. When he continued to laugh she grabbed the car door and attempted to shake it.

"Lawrence Henry Jacobs! You get your stubborn fat ass out of my car right now!" He looked up then. He faked surprise at her being so close to him, red faced and glowering. Calling him Lawrence was always a very bad sign. He had introduced himself as Henry when they had first met in a cafe and Henry he had remained because

Lawrence was such a hard name to work with.

"Are you referring to me?" he asked with a very aggravating look of innocence.

"Yes. Now Henry!" she said giving the car door one last shake

"Now what?" he asked as he casually hung his arm out of the window.

"Get out of my—Henry!" He had pulled the car keys out of her pocket. She reached both hands and her head through the car window trying to grab the keys. She scratched at the back of the hand holding her keys and he tossed the keys into his other hand, holding it out over the passenger's side seat. Groaning in frustration she spoke.

"Give me back my keys," punctuating every word with a slap on his arm.

"Ow, ow stop it Alli!" he said trying to push her away. Alli stood up and looked around the street.

They were in a small suburb outside of Atlanta, Georgia. A curtain a few houses down had been pulled aside and a face adorned with horned rimmed glasses was peering out at them. She looked backed at the car when the engine roared. *No no no.* Henry smiled as his foot pressed down on the gas pedal. *No no no.* Jolting herself out of her shocked trance she ran after the car

as it sped up the street. Where were the police men when you needed them?

"Henry come back!" She stopped putting her hands on her knees. "Dammit."

What had she been thinking? She knew he had the keys. Why had she taken her eyes off of those keys? She should have strangled him when she had the chance. In defeat she walked over to the sidewalk and began wandering home.

The walk to Alli's house was not long, only a few miles, but as the dark grew ominous her anxiousness to get home doubled. By the first rumble of thunder she was walking so fast her legs ached. And when it started pouring she was sprinting. With trails of rain running down her face and into her open mouth, she arrived at her door step sputtering. Her blue Prius was in the driveway and she jogged to the safety of her wrap-around porch. Flies buzzed around the porch light as she wrung out her hair and shirt. She opened the door to find a towel folded on the floor. She mumbled a few accusations at the towel for not being hung on the coat rack by the door, but all the same she was thankful for something dry.

*continued on page 14*

"I have learned so much here. It's a great environment, with a fun bunch of people, all of us in the same boat. So thank you, Skidmore writing camp."

— Elsa Evans-Kummer



Alli's house was a one story house in a very nice neighborhood. She had three bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a large kitchen that took up one eighth of the house. It was the house shape that was remarkable, and also the reason that she and Henry had bought it when they had been together. It was a circle, with a small courtyard in the middle. The courtyard had been very nice when they had first bought the house. Flowers had lined the rim and a fountain had been the centerpiece. Now the fountain had mosses growing on it and was not in use, the flower boxes had flowers but they were sparse and less expensive. And although the patio was nicely swept it had an air of abandonment.

Alli slipped past the kitchen keeping her eyes open and searching for signs of Henry. She entered her room without encountering any undesirable people. She changed into her fleece pajamas and pulled on her bath robe. She wandered back into the kitchen fully pre-

pared to encounter Henry there. It had always been his favorite part of the house. He loved to cook and eat and spent quite a lot of his time doing just that, or so she remembered.

Henry watched from the counter as Alli walked past the kitchen to her bedroom, drying her hair with the towel as she went. He stuck his spoon into the ice cream for another large spoonful. This was how it used to be. He had always gotten home first. He worked as a forester and would come home to cook before Alli had gotten home from the elementary school at which she taught.

Henry slid off the counter, setting his tub of ice cream down and went to the stove. He was stirring the melted chocolate when Alli walked in

"What are you doing?" she asked, her eyes narrowed.

"I'm making a bomb," he said, the corners of his mouth turned down, trying not to smile. Alli walked over to the stove where Henry was standing.

"You're making hot chocolate," she stated, seemingly losing interest.

"Yes I am. I figured you would be cold, after your unplanned shower," he said, digging his own grave.

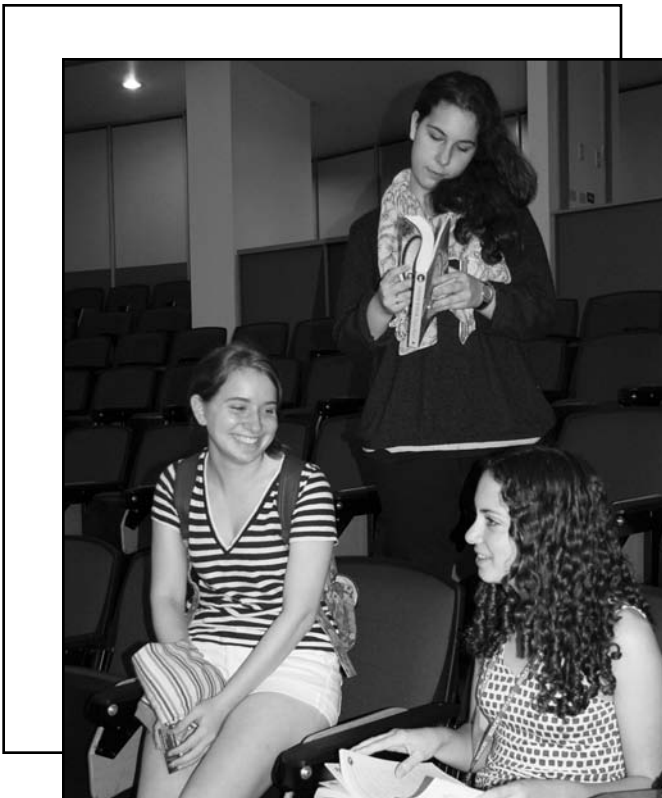
"You are the rudest son of a—" Alli began shouting at him mostly in a string of profanity. By the time she was finished she was out of breath and shivering. Henry wasn't sure if it was from cold or her anger.

"Get out of my kitchen," she said her voice quiet. Henry thought it was best to obey and went to hover by the doorway.

"Why are you even here?" Alli asked. She was referring to him being in her house. He took it as being back in the area.

"I work for the government," he said, watching the change of expression on her face as it turned from anger to confusion.

"My job has stationed me here to work, there are some... things that need to be, uh supervised." He wasn't about to tell her he was a spy for Paris. ■



"I have always been both a writer and a singer. For my singing, I have always received plentiful support and encouragement because singing is something that people immediately hear and recognize as something different. My creative writing, however, receives little to no attention, and especially no feedback or criticism. This fact has constantly saddened me throughout my life. When people make a fuss over my singing, a little voice in my head always says, *But I'm a writer, too.*"

Skidmore has provided the most focused writing environment that I have ever experienced. This has allowed me to live in a community of other writers, with whom I can talk and share my work. It's the kind of place I've always dreamed of—going to readings every night, and making friends with some of the kindest people I've met."

— Claire Dwyer



# Losing my Hat in Florida

By ZACK EYDENBERG

Yellow light spilled out of the hotel in all directions, dissipating into the dark before it could reach me. From the last possible chair at the last possible table, I watched the ocean churn. The pop music fizzled out of the building behind me like cheap soda, leaving my mind glutinous and stained.

In between my bouts of frantic phone-checking, the waves kept me entertained. It had been another five minutes since I last checked my phone, and I reached down for the device, but merely padded the various layers of cloth. I felt the all too familiar chill rush up my spine. Eternal seconds had already branded the time on my skin before I found the phone in the opposite pocket, left there from the last cycle of wave-watching and screen-staring.

I had already felt this way twice. It did not help how desperately I wanted the thing to tell me anything. Behind me, drunken party-goers moved spasmodically. The only other humans were the not-yet-traumatized children, still in a world of table-tunnels and party-hat helmets. I searched my phone again for intelligent signs of life, but was left as unsatisfied as every other lonely scientist stranded on an uninteresting beach.

Hours passed in the misted purgatory, the venue varied only by my movements to different areas of the stone garden. Another few iterations of phone checking and wave-watching had gone by without a mistake, and three ruffians in formal wear appeared in front of my base of operations, laughing maniacally.

"Hey, kid," one of them said. "Give us your hat."

My hat was composed of a very thin, cheap plastic. The sole purpose of this hat was to inform people that it would soon indeed be roughly two-thousand and twelve years since Jesus of Nazareth might have possibly been born. Something like that. Regardless, it really could have done its job on anyone's head, but, believing I had no other solace but my phone at the time, I said, "No."

"How mean of you," said the figure. "That's very mean."

"How is it mean?" I asked. "It's my hat. I own it."

"You don't know how to share?" he asked, with the air of a grade school teacher.

"I have one hat," I explained. "It is not physically possible to share it with anyone else."

"C'mon, kid. What do you need that hat for?"

"What do *you* need that hat for?" We stared at each other for a moment, and the threesome eventually just faded back into the darkness.

Just as this happened, my phone buzzed to life. The blinding gray screen carried the message

*"I'm sorry."*

Finally back in correspondence with the real world, I wasted no time in responding. "*Don't be.*"

"*I'm at Eliza's,*" she said. Eliza was

the kind of girl who didn't speak to groups, and averaged about twelve words per week. You could tell she always had something to say, but she was pretty much just made of anxiety, you know, as opposed to carbon. It was very hard to believe she had suddenly developed the ability to invite large amounts of people over to her house.

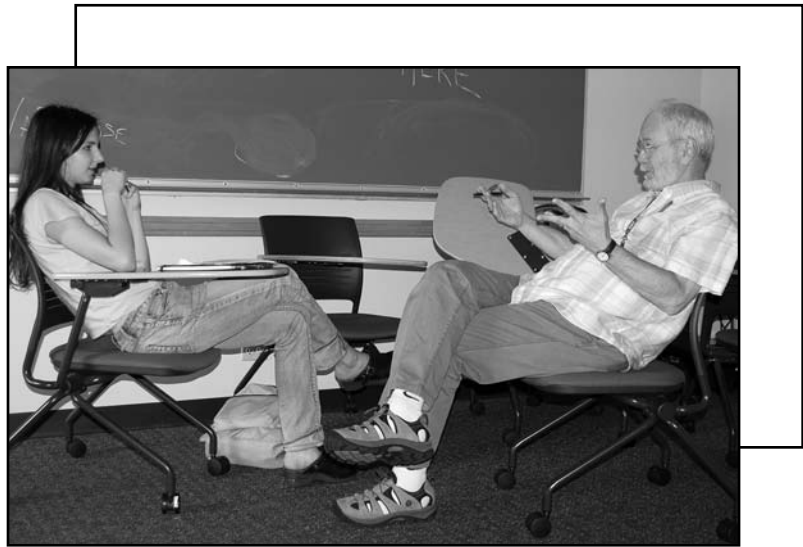
*"So is it a party or are you just hanging out there?"*

*"More of a parent's party,"* she wrote, as I suspected. *"I'm playing Monopoly with Eliza and John."*

My heart sank. Somewhere, hundreds of miles away, there was a Monopoly game being played by the few tolerable people on the planet, and I was in Florida, surrounded by strangers, guarding my hat.

*"Monopoly takes forever,"* I said, not knowing what else to say.

*continued on page 16*



"I absolutely adored this. Not only did it teach me so much about being a writer in the classes, but it gave us a way to collaborate with other writers our age. So it was a learning experience that also gave us friendships which will last a very long time. It is so difficult finding people who understand about being a writer in the teenage world, and so collaborating was beneficial for all of us."

— David Lane

"Yes, well, we have 'til next year," she wrote.

"That's only fifty minutes," I clarified. "Monopoly can last lifetimes."

As I wrote those last few words, I heard footsteps behind me. I turned just in time to duck out of the way of the incoming, outstretched hand. I was out of my seat, staring down the three suit-wearing hooligans, back again from beyond the tree-line in the hotel's other garden.

"What do you want?"

"Your hat," one said. "We've been over this."

"Well, you're not getting it," I said. The first guy vaulted the chair and I ran up the regal staircase back into the party. I pushed my way through the sea of intoxicated strangers. I found my mother and Eric, who seemed content talking not to just another couple, but also to a chair, which they all seemed to think was utterly hilarious. Mother indicated my sister in the corner, unsurprisingly

consumed by her blue and pink iPhone.

I made it to an empty hallway. My precious hat was safe. I took it off my head and spun the plastic disc in the air. I found a spot on the wall and got back to the important part. I searched my mind for something to say, and just went with it.

"Are you the hat, the car, or the thimble?"

"The dog!" she said. "John's the thimble. Eliza's the car."

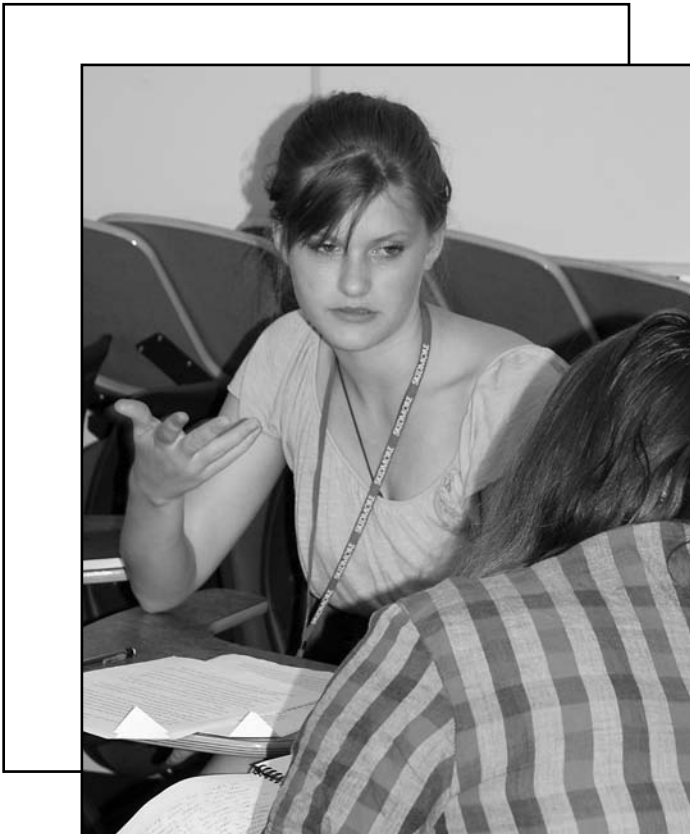
"I'm always the hat when I play," I wrote. It wasn't true. I barely ever played Monopoly, and when I did I just took whatever piece was left. Essentially I had just lied, not for any particular reason. I just did it. I sat amongst the echoes of the poppiest top 20, imagining my participation in a glorious, if too-long game of Monopoly. I'd walk, fly, drive or teleport back home in an instant had I the chance.

A bunch of adults entered the hall-

way, so I moved. I found myself on a remote terrace, and resumed.

"Twelve minutes left," I sent. The wind brushed my face and my hair. I wanted to be home. I wanted to play Monopoly with people I knew. Everyone would ask where I went when I got back, and I would say Florida, and they would say, "How wonderful," and I would die inside a little. Every holiday was like this. I had the rare privilege to be forced into solitude in one of the hottest places I've ever been.

I heard the countdown from inside. I quickly wrote "Happy New Year," and moved to one of the terrace's chairs. As I did, I felt my hat fall off. I went to pick it up behind me, but it was nowhere to be found. I heard a cackle from directly above me, and suddenly knew exactly what had happened. I watched the hat, now attached to some sort of clipper one would get from an amusement park, rising above my head and disappearing over the balcony. ■



"This week at The New York State Summer Young Writers Institute was a completely new experience for me. I have never been to a writing program before, and I was pretty nervous about not measuring up to the other writers in the program and a little scared about meeting new people. But I found when I came here that everyone was met with open arms. The people here are all so accepting, kind, unique, and funny in their own ways. I loved meeting people who had the same interests that I have, who are passionate about writing, like me, and who enjoyed sharing and talking about their work.

This was an amazing experience. I learned so many new techniques, and I received so much great feedback about my writing. I found new inspiration to write all the time. I would love to come back to this program if I get a chance."

— San Kim

# lungfish

BY CLAIRE FACTOR

i'm red.

i'm cement shoes, the seaside.  
i'm dirty; a matchstick or a dildo,  
the thrum of a hammerheart, a stolen tv.

give me miles in the mojave desert for  
i'm the jut of my hips and little else.  
but worth speculation is the itch in my eyes,  
the dead cats in the freezer,  
bulletholes and pores through which whole *lives* have spoken.

and i'm not scars, but from down here in the hole  
i can tell you i'm acclimated with drowning.  
and i'm not bodies, most definitely not my own  
which i know for sure belongs to anyone else.  
so throw me a bone, throw me a pity party,  
but if you tell me you're *sorry* your ass is grass.

put me on a bender, peel my fingernails  
with a potato skinner. suck out the insides.  
string me up by the nipples of my soul  
down by the hudson river where an old friend drowned.

i no longer live by that river. things are not as they were.  
they gave me peace of mind, and sutured my fins,  
and left me to the land. i left the land  
to cement shoes and the seaside.

and though i may have left with no goodbyes,  
i left with no regrets.  
and though i may have left the water running,  
i left with my lungs intact.

it's a far cry, but i know  
you hear me: i'm the one  
who will not come home.

# Working Life/Wasted Life

By ANDREW FEDOROV

Most of us, so far as I can tell, have structured our lives to trap ourselves into spending most of our lives doing something that we long ago decided that we despise. I've only once experienced this living hell of working exclusively for money's sake. It was in a law firm run by a friend of my parents', the summer between 8th and 9th grade. It specialized in corporate law, which sounds like twisting the law to destroy the life of an individual in the name of the corporation. Really, it's about forming and enabling corporations to commit that horrific wrong.

My parents' friend was a rotund fellow glad to give out jobs to acquaintances' children. Maybe he was so willing because of the way he'd attained control of the company. When he was a young lawyer he'd managed to attract the attention of an elderly lawyer who soon died and left him in charge, which meant that he hired employees and made sure they did their work while spending most of the rest of the day in his office using a little bit of that time on legal issues, but most of it on browsing the Web, looking at wine sites and planning vacations. He wasn't really working, but he wasn't quite living either.

My initiation into the working world wasn't a decision I would've

made by myself. My mother had arranged it and only told me when any element of choice in the matter had long ago disappeared. My mother guided me to hell in all aspects of that summer. She'd signed me up to take the health class that was required at some point in my high school career. That wasn't so bad. What was bad was that she signed me up for the earliest possible time.

So my summer began. My days spanned from 6:30 a.m. and went until 5 p.m. when I came home and threw my socks and pants at a wall so they would land neatly on the ever growing pile. Somehow this was summer break.

Each day I would wake up at 6:30 and be driven in for my long early morning health class, which admittedly was fairly simple and undemanding except for its timing. After I sat through my mindless class my mom would pick me up. Despite my protests after having seen the casual shorts and polos of the adults working in the office, she insisted that I dress like the boss in one of my father's old suits which was meant for a 40-year-old man, not a boy entering his first year of high school. So when my mother arrived I would have to get in the back of the SUV and in the back seat change into this suit. As I did this we would drive down to State Street.

When I got there the boss sat me at a desk. I had been assigned to my job precisely as a test of my tolerance of tedious tasks. Its scale was maddening, embodied in the endless and outdated IBM program printouts. The task was to hunt out clients who had not paid their bills. I would look them up on Yahoo search and find new addresses for them. I would write these addresses onto envelopes, print out a letter and write in their name in the proper spot, push the letters into the envelopes, and run them through an automatic stamp machine. Then all these letters would be mailed out.

On the second day I learned that some of the clients I was supposed to

find would be dead. When someone came up as "deceased" I rushed into the boss's office and said, "He's dead."

"Oh, that's all right. Just take him out of the system."

"Really? Um, okay."

I went back to my desk and went through the long but thoughtless process of deleting a person. I experienced dismay at finding that someone I needed to contact was permanently inaccessible.

As it turned out, I had been lucky on my first day to not have any dead people turn up. At a fairly frequent rate they reappeared and the disturbance was made greater by the small amount about their lives that I could deduce from the information which the IBM program so unabashedly displayed. Thus these digital corpses became part of daily life.

The other depressing realization came a few days later when what seemed like all of my letters were returned by the post office without ever having been delivered to their intended recipients. This made me wonder, as I was addressing countless envelopes to new addresses for old people, whether there was a squadron of corpses unaccounted for by the Internet: a squadron of unloved, forgotten souls not even notable enough to fill an obituary. They had wasted their lives in pursuit of money. Struggling to build up a bank account in the name of a corporation, all that was left of them was this mindless, soulless device which was legally a person. I learned to fear being just another part of the unthinking laboring mass, of being an adherent of the mighty dollar, of being an ant stacking pebbles hoping mine will be the defining pebble that makes a few pebbles into a pile. It forced me to realize the lack of value in a petty bill and the richness of enthusiasm and genuine interest; the worthlessness of sold-off hours and the limitless value of one's own time. ■

"In a world that is critical and harsh, I found at this program an atmosphere that was supportive, creative, and inspiring. It also gave me connections with talented writers whom I will never forget."

— Rachel Britton

# The Perpetual Walk

By ABBEY FREDERICK

An Ekphrastic Poem, based on Chuck Webster's *Summer Bomb Pop*

We begin  
Lost  
In infinite brightness  
In boundless yellow light.  
Walking through color  
Instead of space.  
We do not think because we cannot  
Think; we can only walk indefinitely  
Until

We come suddenly to the gaping mouth  
Of a tunnel. It has defined blue edges  
And is striped with white bands  
Which contrast the limitless yellow glow.  
We enter and walk now on the lemony brilliance  
Which has taken shape as the floor under the tunnel's solid walls.  
Now we think while we walk  
And we can see the boundaries so clearly  
Like voodoo we can hold in our hands.  
And this gives us much to consider.  
Until

Not gradually, but all of a sudden,  
The walls are striped red and white  
Instead of white and blue.  
It's more dangerous, perhaps,  
Or maybe just warmer.  
And we come to the end, because this

Is a tunnel, and unlike the yellowness,  
The tunnel has limits; it has a  
Beginning and an end.  
We pass through the last white band,  
And though we may suddenly want  
To stay  
We cannot stop or slow  
Our footfalls,  
Though we try  
Until

We reenter the boundless yellow again  
And it envelops us once more  
As though its brilliance says  
You are mine now.  
It was so vivid when we stood  
Beneath its great circus-tent ceiling  
But as we walk the tunnel fades away behind us  
And in front of us  
And everywhere  
Until

We cannot see it at all  
Anymore. We are surrounded now  
By light but we see only darkness.  
And we resume our perpetual walk  
Which we remember  
As if it were a dream  
From a lifetime ago.

"I really loved the somewhat manic, entirely creative, late night writing sessions. Skidmore and Saratoga Springs present a really great environment for this sort of program. The people are also really wonderful, in a 'make you feel horribly untalented' sort of way."

— Emma Becker



# Untitled

By JULIA GALASSO

The last time my wife left me, I thought she was gone for good, but she came back. I returned home from my job as a doctor at a local mental institution to find her sitting on top of my kitchen table. Marie had been gone for a number of years then and didn't look quite how I remembered her. She was wearing white sweatpants with a black blouse and a sensible pair of sneakers, not her preferred high heels. I noticed that she had lost some weight and though her hair remained the same sandy color, the length had shortened considerably.

When I was done gaping at the figure before me, I thought to close the door behind me. The loud thud, echoing, was the only sound to be heard. Neither of us was made to move, or even to speak. In the end it was the maid who broke the silence. She strode into the room as if unaware of the peculiarity of the situation. She removed her jacket from its peg on the wall near the door and before leaving said only, "Good night, Mr. Smith. Sleep well."

Marie continued staring at me. "Am I the only one who finds this strange?" I voiced aloud.

"I've come back, my love," was her only explanation, and the only one I needed. I stepped forward as if in a daze. I reached out and took her delicate hand in my larger one. She slid gracefully to her feet, standing on the tile floor and I marveled at her beauty. She began to walk, now leading me to the comfort of the sitting room couch. I sat and the love of my life draped herself over my lap. I relaxed in the cushions and warmth. I had so many questions, but I was so very tired and couldn't bring myself to speak. Despite my efforts, I fell into sleep, the best sleep I'd had in two years, ever since my wife had left.

I awoke the next morning, finally feeling at peace. I stretched and called out to my wife. There was no response. I smiled and stood slowly from the cramped sofa. "Honey?" I called, wan-

dering into the kitchen.

I froze when I entered an empty room. My heart nearly stopped, but no, there she was, at the stove making my favorite breakfast. Two eggs, sunny side up, with lightly buttered toast and a glass of orange juice.

"Good morning, sweetie." My beautiful Marie smiled at me. "Have a seat. I already fetched you the morning paper and there's a pen on the table. I know how you love those crosswords."

I had just seated myself comfortably in one of the padded wooden chairs when a knock sounded at the side door. I began to stand again when Marie waved me back. "Don't you worry yourself," she said moving towards the door. Before she reached it, the maid, Ana, walked in. She hung her jacket on the hook by the door where it had been the night before. Ignoring the woman hovering by her side, Ana turned to me.

"Good morning, John. You'd better hurry up or you'll be late." With that said, she walked into the living room and began tidying the couch cushions and replacing the pillows. I turned back towards the table to see that my breakfast had been set for me.

When I was finished, I tidied up, kissed my wife, and left for work, wearing my green coveralls.

As I walked through the halls of the mental facility, people called out greetings to me. "Morning John." I nodded towards an elderly woman.

"Tell them I don't need my meds!" someone yelled.

"It's good to see you out and about, Sarah," I replied.

"Excuse me sir, have you seen my rabbit? I swear he was here a moment ago." I smiled.

My day proceeded normally until lunch, where I found my wife waiting for me at my usual table in the small cafeteria.

"I already got you your sandwich, honey," she said. I returned her smile and began to eat. I was interrupted a moment later by Ana.

"Do you need any help Mr. Smith?"

I waved her away.

I had only finished half of the sandwich when I was disturbed yet again, this time by my son, who was now in his twenties.

"Mike, what are you doing here?" I asked.

"I just came for a visit, dad, to see how you're doing." He looked concerned, and for some reason it angered me.

"Look here, son. I only have a few minutes to eat. There are patients waiting on me, I'm sure you can understand." When he made no move to leave, I sighed. "I assure you I am per-

*"For the first time in my life, I was surrounded by people who love words as much as I do. All of us were different individuals coming from different places, with varying states of mind, united by the goal of creating something worthwhile. I've been waiting for an experience like this for years, and I'm thrilled I found it here."*

— Kit Meyer

fectly fine. Your mother has been taking good care of me." Mike fell silent. He took a deep breath and ran a hand through his already ruffled hair.

"That's what concerns me," he said, before turning back to Ana. "Maybe you should take him back to his room, make sure he takes his medicines, right?"

"I always do." I saw Ana nod and I grew even more frustrated.

"Michael, why are you acting like this? You haven't even said hello to your mother!" The last part I called over my shoulder as Ana led me out into the hall with a firm grip.

"Dad," Mike said, then broke off, changing his mind mid-sentence. "I'm sorry." ■

# Black Friday

By SHAINA GORMLEY

Buttery biscuits, sweet potatoes topped  
with brown sugar, walnuts.  
Bitter-sweet cranberry sauce, a fresh turkey,  
stuffed and ready next to a papier mache one from  
younger days, with its rough, wide belly, hand print  
tail,  
and balloon gobble.

The Macy's Day parade starts out  
the day with the balloons we see, year after year.  
creating the background noise as family arrives  
at my house. Clinking of pans, placing silverware,  
creaking of the inescapable kids' table.  
We share exciting news of good grades,  
weird teachers, and winter sports. My cousins and I  
reminisce  
as if it had been years since I saw them in their last  
school play,  
not months.

Warm hugs, "man hugs" and handshakes.  
Cold plates, warm plates, hot dishes.  
The comfort of family, and the predictable pattern of  
it all. Excitement for the day and evening ahead.

Sharing the meal, thankful for those around us,  
what we have and maybe what we don't.  
Half-hearted disputes between the two tables, I  
argue,  
the same as every year with my conservative aunt  
and uncle,  
including anything that would shock them.  
Such an outspoken young girl, they think,  
better to keep our own away from her.  
We create the illusion of words spoken in secret at  
the kids' table  
to feel like we have advantage over the adults.

Hesitant to clean up the day, even when it's not  
really over. I am invited to spend  
the night at the near-by hotel, same as every  
year, so the three girl cousins will be together longer.

The smell of chlorine, after the usual swim.  
A clean, cool hotel room identical to the ones

from years before. Same hotel, same family,  
comfortable. Pajamas, goodnights, excitement still  
hanging around us, not quite ready to let go.

Screams, shouts, curses thrown. Daylight not  
yet entering the window. Waiting, then checking  
the hallway looking for the answer to the  
interrupted peace. Calm, then the unmistakable  
thud of a body shoved. Calls to the police,  
aunt and uncle running back and forth to  
the hallway. An abused woman in our doorway.  
Her screams fill the air to not call the police.  
Parents rush into the hall to try and help.  
I comfort my younger cousin, while she cries next to  
me, terrified,  
her fear of hotels taking root.  
Only noises from the hallway, no picture to tell. Police  
slow to come.  
Hotel manager with a baseball bat, threatening.  
Chaos, bedlam, lack of order.  
The man runs off, leaving us safe for now. Time pass-  
es, sleep never comes.  
Black Friday shoppers oblivious to the  
cruelty of the world.



"Through this Institute, I was able to explore many new  
forms of writing with many types of people. I had inter-  
esting adventures and encountered new ideas I had  
never seen before. I will treasure what I learned here."

— Rachel Lim



# *La Vérité de la Mentuse*

By MADDIE GRISARU

because everyone is different, because no one is unique  
because truth is an unpracticed science, because what we are

is what we would be, i will strip myself down  
to my bones and i will clean the mirror.

the truth about me is a daredevil girl, the truth  
about me is a doubtless girl, a velvet dreams

and misadventures girl. The truth about me  
is a clouded window pane, indestructible, unyielding

the truth about me is a walk alone, stand alone girl  
the truth about me is a leather jacket

lace dress firefly sweat night. The truth about me is a long stride  
baby steps girl, the truth about me is a girl bien dans sa peau

that is the truth about me and the truth is that  
the grass is not green at all, it is everything

but green. i am not what you thought at all  
and what is truth is lie.

the truth about truth is that even  
your shadow leaves you when you are in the dark.



“This experience ended up being vastly different, in all the best ways, than I could have expected. Although it was ten days, it still felt too short. I’ve made some amazing new friends, whom I respect as writers and as human beings. I’ve learned invaluable things about writing here, and this program has helped me become more in tune with how important writing is to me. Although I was initially nervous, I’m so glad I did it.”

— Rebecca Martin

# Untitled

By MIKE GYARMATHY

Born the same as any,  
Shaped by passions and hatred,  
I set myself apart, an individual.  
Insignificant.  
When I become too tired, ideals of society take me,  
back to where we started.  
As passions fade I become indifferent.  
Where will my heart find salvation?  
And my mind?  
What is reason if not my own?  
In the Darkness now  
Do I still live on?



“This week has been pretty amazing. I’ve made several new friends, all of whom I’ll be keeping in touch with to share writing in the future. I got along very well with the others, and the Resident Assistants made us feel relatively at home. The campus was beautiful and perfect for outdoor writing and activities.

The classes—poetry, fiction, and nonfiction—all helped me to grow as a writer, and I now know a great deal about how to write for a living instead of just as a hobby. The one-on-one editing sessions worked for me because they were very easygoing. It was like meeting with an equal, and I felt respected. My editor (Elaine Handley) gave me many things to think about.

All in all I am leaving Skidmore with a better writing and editing strategy, and a lot to tell my friends back home. ”

— Johanna Mohrs

# The Las Vegas Strangers

By MADISON HUGHES

I never knew what to call my father's parents on the rare occurrences when I visited them. Obviously calling them by their first names was too casual, but calling them Mrs. and Mr. was too formal. However, Grandma and Grandpa tasted like bitter medicine in my mouth. I would open my mouth, but the words stuck in my throat like peanut butter. It was too intimate. When we arrived at their house and knocked, there was a drawn out pause. We waited, and I tried to mentally prepare myself for anything that might happen. The door opened a crack, and my grandfather poked his head through. "Oh! What a surprise!" he exclaimed, shuffling forward to greet us. My grandma stood next to him, in her underwear.

"Carol needs to put her pants on. We were not expecting visitors," my grandpa explained. However, he

opened the door and allowed us in. All manner of junk was strewn throughout the room. Piles of papers and discarded letters. A rack of wrangler jeans. Stacks of photographs, and boxes upon boxes of plastic gloves. My grandmother wobbled precariously, her frail body constantly in danger of toppling over. She was delicate in most respects, yet as sharp as a knife. She seemed to be made of tiny bird bones, and her face was long and pale as an onion peel. She had very distinctive rosebud lips that drooped downwards into a perpetual frown. Her watery grey eyes stared blankly ahead and her grey hair piled on top of her head like dandelion fluff. It was easy to see she had been beautiful once, to imagine that her full lips embraced a warm smile. I could imagine her cheekbones were high and chiseled before when they had defied gravity. But her features with age withered

into a stern older women.

You would never believe my grandfather had gone to Harvard. And if I told you he was a psychiatrist, you'd think I was downright insane. His scraggly salt and pepper beard had evaded the barber, and his wild, frizzy gray hair brushed to his shoulders. He would smile and laugh, and display missing teeth and eroding gums. He avoided vitamins and medicines and asserted, "I get all the nutrients from the food I eat and doctors are just trying to make money from your misery." However, he must have been handsome once. I could see fleeting traces of his younger self, and traces of my father. His hooked nose and hazel eyes were my father's.

My dad professed to them, "Mom and Dad, we are going to do some work here."

"Oh, that's wonderful!" my grandfather gushed. My parents and my two brothers and I set about cleaning. I scrubbed grime from their windows, and my face flushed instantly. My skin beaded with sweat, and perspiration coated my upper lip. The hot Las Vegas sun beat down on my dehydrated skin and my parched throat as I scrubbed the outside door windows. Outside was fresher than indoors. Indoors the air hung stuffy and dust clogged our noses, throats, and eyes. The scent laced with discarded diapers hung like a moldy cloud. Outdoors I stood in direct sunlight, with no real breeze, and humidity glued my clothes to my body. Ironically, a swimming pool languished in the backyard, unused for years. Once every single speck vanished from the windows, I went indoors for vacuuming, sweeping, and sorting.

However, I somewhat reluctantly sorted cans in the kitchen with my grandmother. I was not bothered by the can's expiration dates, but the presence of my diminutive grandmother was somehow intimidating. It was something to do with her steely gaze. Or her sharp-edged cheekbones. Perhaps the pasty ghost-like expression or accusa-



"It's probably the most tiring and writing-intensive week I've ever had—I loved it. I was constantly surrounded by people who had the same passion as I did. The classes were filled with inspirational teachers. It's been an amazing experience. It really improves your writing and leaves you motivated."

— Lynn Wang

tory pout? However, as I sorted through the cans she informed me, “Thank you, you’re such a sweetheart. You don’t need to be scared of grandma.” *She knew I was scared of her? Well scared was the wrong word. I was uncomfortable.* I felt uncomfortable that I barely knew my grandparents.

“What is your earliest memory of me?” my grandfather asked.

“I remember we would go to magic shows together,” I recalled.

“That’s all you remember? We used to invent games when you were really little. Do you remember that?” I stared at him blankly. No, I had not remembered that. Later on that night, “Carol is very sick,” he confessed.

“Did you take her to see a doctor?” my parents urged.

“No, they prescribe bad medicines with negative side effects,” he argued. My parents sighed but resisted further argument. We had not visited to stir up tension. My family left the house at five o’clock that night, drenched in sweat

and coated in dust.

“They’re just gonna be hoarding again anyways,” my brother Graham grumbled.

My brother tended to challenge other people, even adults.

“Grandpa, do you *really* need this garden hose?” Graham would question as he sorted through useless objects in the garage.

We had left the house feeling dejected, foreseeing our grandparents’ inevitable pattern of hoarding and evading doctors. My parents’ hints to my grandparents to see a doctor were stubbornly refused, until several weeks after we left Las Vegas when their way of life altered dramatically. When my dad received the phone call from them, he rushed to Las Vegas. Their neighbor, noticing my grandmother’s ninety-pound frame and shaking limbs, urged them to see a doctor. The reason they relented I am not sure. All I knew was despite my grandfather’s isolation from everyone else, he was devoted to his

wife. I can picture them in the hospital, as grandma laid on a white bed with tubes snaking down her throat. I could envision my grandfather holding her doll-like hand as the doctors diagnosed her with Parkinson’s.

However, with my grandmother in the hospital, we felt a renewed sense of hope. They had finally sought medical attention, and placed trust in doctors. “My mom is improving rapidly, and making friends with the older folks there. She seems happier,” my dad said. My father had flown down to Las Vegas to visit my grandma in the hospital. None of us were surprised when my dad reported that our cleaning efforts were “unnoticeable”, but my dad did not say they were “in vain.” The cleaning effect was more than to create a physically safe place for them. In fact, the expected change to utter chaos was disappointing, but not shattering. The work was a silent exchange of mutual forgiveness and peace with each other. ■

“The New York State Summer Young Writers Institute ... really helped to develop a community in which every single member was working on something strange and fascinating. It’s been this way for all three years I’ve attended the Institute, but never more so than this year.”

— Andrew Fedorov



## *Last in You*

By SAN KIM

You cannot be contained  
in the ink that flows from my pen.  
I would need an ocean of black,  
rivulets running down my page,  
staining my fingers permanently  
because your presence never fades.

Every time I let go of your hand  
I feel as if you have left  
too deep a mark.  
The scent of your musky skin  
forever mingled with mine,  
borrowed clothes and  
colloquialisms become my own.

No more saturday drives with my father,  
they are dedicated to you now.

Sometimes I feel as if  
I am not myself anymore,  
the ink has stained me black  
until i am nothing but a shadow  
of you.



“As writers, we are rather like-minded: the way we perceive, notice, absorb, and interpret the world around us is different from most everybody else. As an incoming senior in high school, I’ve felt most of my life somewhat isolated, because no one around me saw things like I did. But when I arrived here, it was like there were 39 clones of me. It was baffling, unnerving, and massively exciting at the same time. It’s good to know I’m really not as alone in my head as I thought I was. Thank you.”

— Madeline Grisaru

# The Asylum

By DAVID LANE

A flower walked into the room. “It’s about time for his therapy now Mason,” spoke the flower to the rock that sat watching the children. “Which one?” he rumbled.

“The blind one.”

“Go ahead and take him over to Dr. Ross.”

He always spoke with such a lazy strength, as if the world gave up on him as quartz, and so he crusted over with a thick layer of sediment, covering up the crystal he had with in. However, I know it is there, and it will always be there, but my opinion does not matter, the only opinion that matters is his own. The flower came to the iron bars of my crib then spoke in the same sweet plastic voice she always spoke to all the children, “Ok sweetie, it’s time to go to Santa.” She then presented the same plastic smile she always does, and preceded to unlock my crib and put me in the chains that she and the rest of the baby sitters call the hugs of love. I do not understand what a flower like her is doing in the basement. She deserves to live in a garden and be nurtured by a gardener and fill the garden with her seed. Perhaps then she wouldn’t be so bitter. Sometimes she gets so wrapped up in that she must act to be a rose and loses track of who she is and that she is still a tulip and to herself she becomes the dirt she was born from. We arrived at the door to his room. And the jolly man that everyone teases and calls Santa opened the door. They only call him that because one of the children mistook him for Santa. And I can see why, he is a fat man, perhaps around the age of 60 with a white beard and white hair. Not to mention he is the only other human here besides myself. However, Santa wore glasses because he could not see. Ross does not need glasses. He can see like an eagle, actually, even better than the eagle who watches us with her huge yellow eyes when the rock is not there. He sees enough to be able to know that you do not need eyes to see. The flower went into his room, “Don’t you go anywhere while I’m

gone,” she said sweetly. I know she knows I’m immobilized, and so her beauty came from the sence of her humor. “He’s here for his 3 o’clock session Ross.” She spoke plainly. “Ah, of course, thank you Mackenzie,” he spoke gladly. She wheeled me in and said her sweet plastic goodbye and closed the door. His walls are always strewn with images and writings of trees, one of the few things about him I seem to not understand... “Shall we continue our project son?” he asked.

“Of coarse Ross.” I opened my mind and allowed for myself to come back to center, as I have learned from Ross. Then I released the valve and let the water flow out and become the locked memories I hid within. This is what I saw.

My mother had laid a mighty egg. She and the rooster were so proud, “It has to be at least a foot tall!” they would boast. Then when the egg had hatched,

the hen and the rooster did not know what hatched from their egg. I had no desire for the chicken feed nor sitting around clucking the day away. My skin was not coated with soft warm feathers. My skin was tough and hard, and no one could figure out what I was. Nevertheless, they loved me, but the question of what I was weighed on all of our minds. “Why am I not a chicken like my parents? What am I? These questions weighed throughout my youth until their confusion became so great, they deemed me a child and so they put me here. Only for me to believe I was a turtle and so I hid within my self, afraid of the children around me. Afraid of all the kittens, and all the puppies, and joeys, and the cubs, and I only wished to be a sapling like the ones around me who deemed me normal. But I will never be one, unless I con-

*continued on page 28*



“This week was absolutely wonderful. The main thing, of course, was getting to meet visiting author Gregory Maguire, but there was also the amazing discovery that there are other nut-jobs like me out there. I am not alone. The classes were great, the RAs were helpful, and the only thing I would like to change about the residence hall would be the addition of an air conditioner. Overall it was great, and I plan on applying next year.”

— Noah LaPointe

vince my self I am one, just like how I only thought I was a turtle. But that wouldn't change what I really am," I said,

"Why would you say that?"

"Because I'm a human, we are both humans."

"Sometimes an adult may become a child half way through life."

"But I am not a tree."

"That is true. A human may never become a tree and a tree may never become a human, but as you have found, our mind may learn to see what ever facade it may put up."

There was a long pause; I was trying to make sense of why he would remind me of something he knows I already know... then I understood. It was then that his skin dissolved and he became a tree right before me. It was then that I realized that I'm all alone in this world, I sat in my crib for hours, afraid and shaking. I'm alone; I'm the only one of my kind... I curled up and embraced the cold night with fear and confusion, I was within the maze of darkness with a map but no light to read it with, I was

cold but had no jacket to warm me up for I was alone and the only one of my kind. I wandered into the void and searched for the sun, crashing into walls and falling through the layers of the mind, then my eyes opened, and I saw the bark I had on my arms and I understood, I am a tree, not a human. After that, Ross evaluated my sight himself and said I could see perfectly. They then released me from my crib. I was free, and so I moved back to the garden where the saplings I remember from my memories were. I saw their true forms as well, and they where no longer saplings. They have become the rocks and the skies and the flowers and the waters that fed them. I then settled down with the only other tree in the garden and the two of us together bloomed. We filled the voids within our selves, and the night never seemed to be cold ever again, for we were each other's sweater. Our fruit then fed the garden in great hopes that they, too, may see as we see. Then together we grew even larger than the skies above. It did not take long for both of us to realize that we saw clearer than the eagle who danced with the sky and more vast as well. Funny, how us trees can

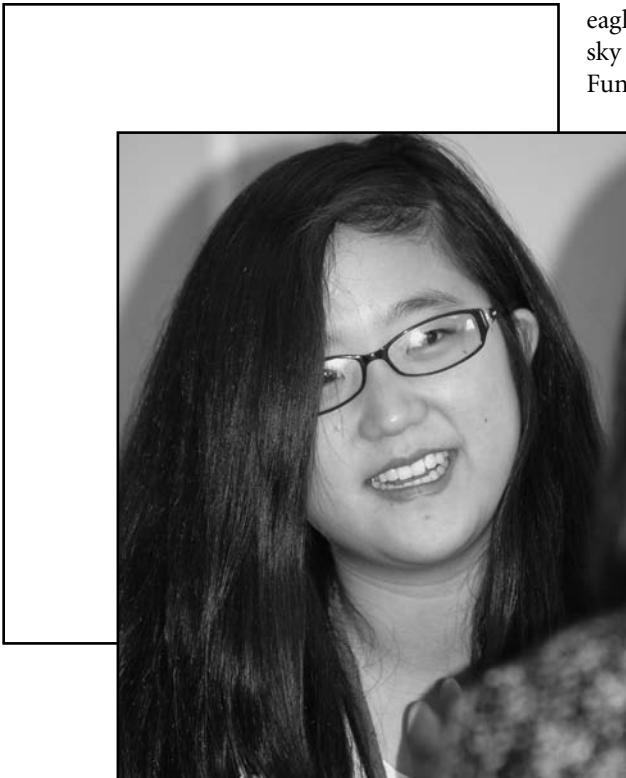
see better than anything else in this world, because we have no eyes.

**An excerpt from Ross's patient log**

Patient 345 Current Status:

RELEASED

Patient 345 demonstrates an ability to pick up on people's personalities easily and to look at them from a nonbiased perspective. Since he cannot see, he has labeled people within his mind as things that represent their personalities. For example, he said his mother was a hen. However he does not know what a hen looks like, he only knows the metaphorical meaning of a hen, being a motherly and nurturing figure and so he labels his mother as a hen. He does not believe she is a physical hen. So, it is evident to me that he has been misdiagnosed with schizophrenia, and so he was released from the insane asylum. In my opinion, he actually understands more than most people, and it's because he is blind. He is able to release himself from the physical world, a trait very hard to develop, especially in today's world when our senses are bombarded constantly. I'm sure he will live a fuller life than most people will now that he is out of the asylum that locked him up since he was young. ■



"This camp brought me out of my little world in Albany and showed me that there is so much more to life than the private, Catholic, all-girls high school that I attend. The people I met here I will never, ever forget. Everything and everyone around me was a complete inspiration for my writing. What a great, friendly setting for a writing camp. The people were kind and accepting, and it was a very open campus."

— Sofia Lesko



# Asylum

By NICK LANGEN

*It was the strangest thing today/I saw  
footprints in abandoned pathways*

—Frank Turner

*(Smiling at strangers on trains)*

Every so often, small chunks of debris and detritus drift into orbit around a larger planetoid or star. Once in a blue moon you are the blue moon. In a glass world of transparency and distortion, you still enjoy the simple things in life, like holding your girlfriend's hand on a subway.

You aren't quite sure why but your mind pedals back through the woods to the place you found oh so many years ago. You remember your bike, your trusty blue steed with the sticky chain and the iffy gears, but you would never trade it in no matter how small it was for you. The path was a narrow one along several fields and through some dense forestation. It deposited you somewhere gray, strange, and broken.

Fast forward to your girlfriend's hands clasped over yours in a dirty subway car on seats that have seen more stains and filth than they would tell you about on brochures. On that subway you saw an old woman, wrinkled as they usually are, clutching a book with white knuckles. You didn't give it much thought.

Over the hills and through the woods, there was a placid tranquility to this place. You could smell the nature start to climb through the buildings and settle, even though the windows were boarded and the doors blocked. Maybe it was the cement sky or the darkness in between the window planks, but it was unsettled ground. Wind rattled through halls and filled those chalky lungs with air, sighing and sagging as they slept.

You went to the Museum of Science that day with your girlfriend. You like stars, she likes asteroids and comets. You tell her that if you ever discover a comet, her name will be all over it. People walked by but you were oblivious, they were dark matter in a universe inhabited only by one star.



Stars brought you back to those buildings. In the darkness between the wooden planks you caught a glimpse of something glowing. They were stuck to the ceiling with adhesive, the glow in the dark kind that kept you up way past your bedtime when you were a kid, the ones whose adhesive stuck to your imagination as well as your walls. Who sat up there, when this place was new? There were no signs in this. You saw fresh footprints in mud left over from yesterday's rainfall. You weren't the first to be drawn to this place.

You saw wheat, ruby, and coffee colored hair bounce by as well as every color in between—they jostled down the city streets. The buildings kissed the clouds and you would've kissed her too, but that's hard to do while walking and a little more PDA than either of you would be comfortable with. You two laughed at everything.

After you pedaled your way home your parents told you that you saw the sinking carcass of a mental asylum, condemned and most certainly a little haunted. Strangely enough you only

found it haunting. You were drawn into its orbit, a blue moon on a cement sky.

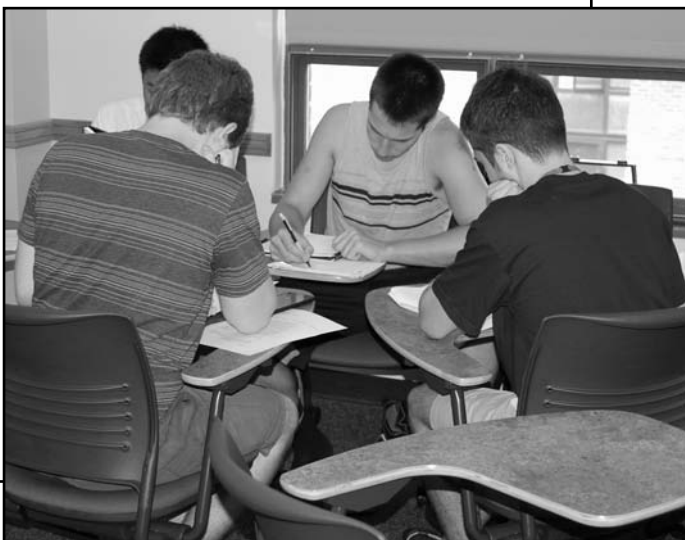
When you returned home from your date nearly six hours after you first saw her, the same woman was in the same place reading the same book with the same white knuckles, her age making it look like her transformation from human to skeleton started with her hands and was slowly creeping upwards. Your re-sighting of her prompted the question, was everyone here the same, drawn around us like those asteroids hanging on strings orbiting the glow in the condemned rooms?

It made sense to you. She was the center of your world and you were the center of hers. The resultant gravitational pull naturally would pull all else into your orbit. When you look back on your relationship with her, you see exactly why your mind went back to those woods. She is a place of asylum. And you are insane. Except you would never abandon her. And no matter what else this place has been or can be, it has always been and will always be full of crazy. ■

# Self Portrait as a Steel Chair

By NOAH T. LaPOINTE

I'm made of velvet skin,  
Cushion head.  
Don't sit right there!  
Collapsing legs...  
Arms can bend...  
Too much weight!  
Please, sir!  
Remove your ass! Now!  
Creaking steel.  
Hollowed metal.  
Tremendous load  
Break my shins  
Abused.  
Neglected.  
Seen as not.  
Used for break-ins...  
And outs.  
Get up high now  
Step on me. Top shelf  
No, I do not like you, ma'am  
Heels hurt like the Dickens.  
Pierce the skin they do.  
Into the stuffing.  
Careful!  
Weight! WEIGHT!  
Well, down you go.  
Bye now.  
Warned you...



“My time here has been a light bulb. No matter how odd that may sound, it is the simple truth. My mind needed a wake-up call, and coming to the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute reminded me how much I need writing in my life. Staying up until 3 a.m. writing poetry, eating literally mountains of food, and meeting new comrades was all part of what made this experience quite beneficial indeed.”

— Sophia M.C. Scanlon

# Unexpected

By SOFIA LESKO

Was I a terrible person for not going? Possibly? Maybe? In the moment, no amount of reassurance could tell me that there wasn't a large probability that I was one of the worst grandchildren that there had ever been.

As I lay in bed, my plush navy and white comforter up to my shoulders and wrapped around my neck, I wanted to kick myself. But kicking myself would require moving, which would then bring upon me a whole new level of shivers and chills. My mother was busy making me soup downstairs, kindly and carefully letting me have a little time to myself.

I had never, ever planned on being bedridden with mono, especially not now.

And the only thing worse than being bedridden with mono was the fact that my grandmother had just been diagnosed with lung cancer earlier in the week, and was bedridden herself.

But not at home with a sweet and understanding and concerned mother who was going to make her soup and take her temperature and watch over her at all times. My grandmother was at a hospital in a bed that wasn't even her own, with relatives that could only hope for the best.

Now on a dreary Saturday, my stepmother and dad were going out to visit her in western New York for the weekend, and my own disease was preventing me from getting to see her, and be there for her as well.

All I could do was lay in bed and imagine her beautiful white curls, which she took so much care of with her pink rollers, deflating and the wrinkles she hid with gorgeous skin-colored makeup, drowning out her face as she wasted slowly away in her hospital bed.

And I was going to miss all of it.

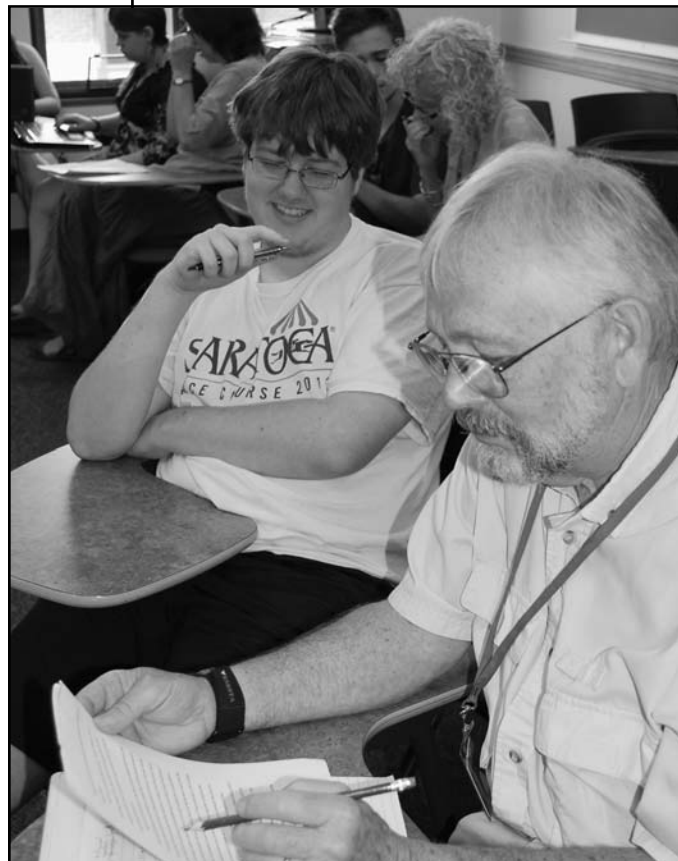
All the memories of swimming in her pool while she made lemonade, helping her make all of her legendary holiday dinners and apple pies, while looking up at her and asking her about all of her makeup tricks that she kept up in her old age, were floating out of the window, and I wasn't around to catch them.

I swore the second I got better I was going to visit her. Yes, that was it. I would rest this week and then go visit her next weekend. I would be doing much better by then if I just gave the sickness some time.

Currently, however, I was helpless, as my mother kindly but sadly brought me my soup in bed, and I drifted in and out of pockets of unhelpful sleep. ■

“Coming into the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute (or, for that matter, any writing program), for the first time, I was afraid that I would not be as talented as the other writers and afraid that I wouldn't be able to make any friends. From the first day of classes, however, all my fears instantly disappeared. Every student in my class was supportive of everyone else and gave primarily positive feedback. Even when giving negative feedback, they chose their words carefully and always maintained a high level of respect. I felt more than welcomed, and quickly made warm friends.”

— Gloria Park



# Old Witch

By RACHEL LIM

In the bustling heart of China, Beijing, a beastly spirit of fervor and tenacity was in the air. Flocks of townspeople bustled noisily to their assigned destinations, while songs praising Mao rang harmoniously through the winding streets and empty alleyways. Town hall leaders, clad in mixed anxiousness and pride, were zealously distributing *Mao zhuxi yulu*, or as Westerners might know it as, the Little Red Books. Near the residential area, a fatigued water woman laid giant tins of boiling water at each doorstep, with her young daughter trailing excitedly behind her. The Red Guard children, gathered at every fork and road, were aware of each and every episode of the city. The Red Guard was a powerful force, and its patriotism and supremacy ran like wildfire. They were a recent but complicated network that reacted to any sign of the Five Black Categories akin to firecrackers, swift and ready to exterminate anything that would get in their way.

Within our own home, was also a fuze ready to blow. Kneeling on the wooden floor was my mother, Lin Fengxia, a beautiful woman who was perfect in every aspect as both a woman and a teacher. A young Red Guard officer, Gretel, casted a looming shadow over her feeble body. Crowds of Mao green uniforms and caps surrounded both figures, jostling and jeering like the cackling flames of a smelting pot fire. My father and I, held back by the wrists, could do nothing but stare in shock and disbelief.

As the children continued to struggle, Gretel proclaimed with stony eyes, "Woman. You are under arrest for disrespecting our leader by spreading our past teachings."

"I did no such thing! I teach only Mao's words!" my mother cried, but a Red Guard violently tossed her to the floor in response.

"She's the daughter of a Black family! She cannot possibly know the ways of the Red! Re-education! Re-education! She's wronged our leader and the future of our people!"



"This institute has greatly improved my writing and helped me make some new friends who share my interest in writing. I enjoyed it very much and hope the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute grows."

— Justin Sung

"Come despicable woman," another guard said, hastily carrying her away.

The Red Guard lauded victoriously behind as father pleaded uselessly behind them, enduring each kick and punch until he crumpled in sobbing defeat. Gretel, who remained behind to oversee the spectacle, glanced at him with a puzzled expression.

"Why are you crying father? Do not worry. We are simply re-molding mother's ideology with our wonderful leader's teachings."

Father could not and did not respond, and remained on the floor until his morale and body withered, a weak heart and gaunt cheekbones ghosting his features.

Weeks after the incident, the house became dead silent. Gretel was long gone and lost with the Red Guards, using the same brute force and pride on the other members of the bourgeois and the Five Black Categories in the

town. My father no longer left his own room, and I was well aware that the Red Guards would probably also arrest him soon. Angry with Gretel and my own vulnerability, I kicked a nearby pebble with all my might. The pebble loudly hit the side of a shabby house, and an old woman slowly stepped outside right after.

"I'm sorry," I promptly said.

"I am Old Witch," the aged woman proclaimed, ignoring my apology. A toothless smile appeared on her frail features. "Come inside."

Unconsciously, I entered the run-down confines of her home and she immediately sat me down on one of the creaky, wooden chairs next to a small table.

"What do you seek?" she asked as she delicately poured a cup of jasmine tea. It was an unfamiliar but pleasing

*continued on page 33*

scent, and simultaneously provoked an uneasiness and comfort within me.

It was odd, the inside of her home. The structure itself was considerably decayed, but its belongings shimmered a mysterious aura of the ancient and obscure. It was quite dark, except for the candlelight that reflected off the shiny objects and jewels in the room, making it seem more spacious than it actually was. It reminded me of the grand, traditional houses I saw in the old paintings burned by the Red Guards several years ago.

Glancing around the cramped area, I noticed there were more elaborate scriptures and sculptures of jade, and gold trinkets adorning each corner. It was unusual to see such extravagance in anyone's home, and I was honestly surprised that the Red Guards didn't burn her alive with this house.

"I wish to know the past," I answered quietly.

The woman gave a loud sigh, and paused. She rubbed her fingers against the linen of her flimsy clothing, and pondered.

"As you can see, I have many belongings in this shabby house of mine." Her eyes twinkled. "If you know how to keep a secret, you can help me manage and maintain these belongings. In exchange, I'll give you my knowledge."

It was a risk. Were I ever to be caught by the Red Guards, I knew I would definitely share the fate of my mother or even be killed.

"Understood."

"Good, we start tomorrow," she grinned, and I promptly came to her the very next day.

As I was gently polishing one of the porcelain bowls on her shelf, I saw a picture of a young girl with twin-tails scooped in the arms of an elder woman. They were standing outside a grand building, much like the home I imagined when I first stepped inside this place.

"She is my granddaughter," Old Witch said, appearing behind my shoulder.

"Where is she now?" I asked,

"Gone." Old Witch sat down. "Her father was a rich scholar, and refused to donate his wealth to the party. I had gone out to the market that day, and when I came back, I found the house in ruins and the whole family gone. I scrambled to retrieve what remained, and have been living in hiding."

I said nothing.

"It has been my dream since then to eat one, hot bowl of rice," she finally said, and a gentle smile graced her weary and rugged features.

"Can't you have gotten one from the communal kitchen?" I asked.

"Boy, did you just hear me? Our family is considered to be criminals. If I showed my face to the public, they would surely kill me immediately."

"Why did you let me in if you're trying to keep your existence a secret?"

"You seemed unsatisfied with our world," she said after a pause, "and I am too."

And so this transaction continued for days and then for weeks, until Old Witch grew to be the grandmother I never knew, and the companion I never had. We were long lost friends in crime, and I began to spend days away from home and in her shabby room.

"Gege (Elder Brother), you've been gone daily for long periods of time. What have you been doing?" Gretel asked, finally home after a town hall meeting. We were both sitting at the table, eating our portion of the chicken and rice they distributed.

"I've been out studying the Red Book and preaching it to the corrupted," I lied. "It's a very rewarding but time-consuming task."

"That's wonderful!" my sister exclaimed, a look of relief crossing her delicate features. "I was worried you were getting involved with the revolutionaries or getting hassled by the rich. I'm so happy you understand me, Gege."

"Well then," I said, finishing my last piece of chicken and taking the bowl to the washing bin, "I'm going to go now."

Gretel bid me farewell, and I quick-

ly left the house, hastily stuffing a handful of rice into my worn pockets.

As soon as I went inside of Old Witch's home, I felt a sharp blow to my head from behind. They dragged me outside, and beat me until I stopped resisting. A couple stepped away, they threw me onto the ground, my blood mingling with the grass and the dirt. As I looked up, I saw armies of Red Guard children surrounding the area.

"How did you find me?" I sputtered, kneeling on the ground as Gretel's body loomed over my battered face.

"You left a trail of grains behind."

To my horror, I realized that the rice indeed was emptied from my torn pocket, and the remaining grains were scattered at Old Witch's feet. She remained silent, patiently abject to the guards and avoiding my panicked gaze.

Gretel turned to the crowd and cried, "This woman has corrupted my brother! She'll corrupt our youth, feed them with lies! She teaches a black book!"

The children began to sneer and throw rocks at Old Witch, her crisp red blood painting the jagged edges of the stone.

"Stop! Stop!" I bellowed until my voice grew hoarse, but the Red Guard children simply roared in concord, and shoved Old Witch back into her home, carelessly barricading the door with the myriad of objects that she so preciously loved and cared for.

Old Witch and her house were set ablaze, with centuries of ancient scrolls and valuables consumed in the fiery oven, a red, red as the blood spilled in revolution and red as the great Communist Party scorching in the flames.

Gretel faced me with hurt and betrayal in her eyes and shouted, "Take him away too! For re-education!"

As the Red Guard carried me away, I quietly sobbed. Old Witch was gone. The magic she restored was destroyed, extinct forever like the remains of her family, and the crumbling past that she treasured so. ■

# Turncoat

By REBECCA MARTIN

It was nine o'clock, and the auditorium smelled like blood.

Sol's hands always shook when it was over; she couldn't help it, even though Tobias told her that it was no use, she'd just wear out her nerves. How could she tell him that nerves were all she had in this place where the only stars were artificial pinpricks lining either side of the roadway?

Tria Perele had been the first that night. Sol remembered her face, milky, translucent, in the marketplace, buying oranges for her sister. They might have exchanged smiles.

"It's just --" Sol began to say, her voice barely above a whisper. All around them neighbors moved, their lips turned up, the Cleansing already forgotten. Nightly attendance was mandatory, and somehow the others seemed to have forgotten why it had ever bothered them.

"Not now," Tobias interrupted, but he squeezed her hand. She pressed her lips together, conscious of Caprice's laughter a few yards away. Her red hair was dimly visible, her eerily musical voice carrying across the great lawn.

"I know." Sol let out a sigh. Tonight she couldn't meet her husband's eyes. The weight of nights like these, five years in a row, sat on her lungs, heart, finger bones.

Eli Dmatar had been second, and while he didn't scream—none of them did—Sol had seen his eyes widen as they watched the blade come down, seated in the middle of the auditorium, surrounded by their neighbors.

"There's just no room for lawbreakers," Caprice was saying behind them. It was not a new sentiment; the Fifth Civil Council had adopted it, engraving a Latin equivalent on the courthouse pillars.

Housing compounds rose like boulders ahead of them as they walked. Sol couldn't remember speaking with anyone but Tobias on the way home from the Cleansing. She knew she'd cried the first night, terrified that Caprice or another neighbor or official would see her tears. Her dreams were flooded with the toneless humming of lights above her, the mute executioners standing on either side of the dais, a cool recorded voice reciting a list of crimes, and the transgressor's eyes as they looked at the guillotine.

The blood was cleaned thoroughly, but they couldn't get rid of the smell. Sol had started to wonder if she was the only one who still noticed it. She wondered if she was the only one who still saw the transgressors' faces at all.

"When we get home," Tobias said softly. Even though they couldn't talk

about it, he always held her hand. Tears burned in her eyes, but by now she knew how to force them to stay there. The sharp smell of cut grass burned her nose as they approached the front door.

Ellis Jier had been third, and last. A brief Cleansing.

Sol listened for the click of the lock once they were inside, and was surprised to discover that she didn't feel like crying anymore. She looked at Tobias with uncertainty, twisting and untwisting her long hair. Moonlight filtered in through the shades, but neither she nor her husband moved to turn the lights on.

"It's all good, Sol," he said, and she held her breath before she reached beneath the kitchen sink, her fingers searching in the dark for the right button. A metallic exhale brushed her face as the door slid open to reveal a tangle of pipes, Simon Larus, a tax evader, and Julia Kinneret, a protestor.

"Are you okay?" Sol whispered.

"Who was it tonight?" This was Julia.

"It doesn't matter."

Although they were safe in passage behind the wall, they looked at her with the eyes of the hunted, numbers four and five, and Sol wished she could promise them that their safety was guaranteed. ■



"I had a fantastic time at Skidmore. I made so many wonderful friends that I will keep in touch with, people that I can share my writing with and know that they'll give me great feedback. I even became a poet while I was here, something I never imagined becoming passionate about. My only complaint is that I wish I could come back next year."

— Paige Trevisani

# Untitled

By GRATIS MAXWELL

I thought my wife had left me, but she is back. Yes, she will barely speak to me. She actually seems far more interested in the wall to my immediate left. But she is back. I'm glancing intermittently at her and the fridge in the wall behind her. I'm thirsty, but I'm not quite sure if getting off the stool will trigger some undesirable reaction. Elaine had a habit of being spontaneous.

As I sit, I run my hand over the cool marble surface of the island. She sits across from me, head perched on her palm, the attached elbow stabbing into the counter. Her thin features give her a dangerous, predatory look, even with her expressionless face. The kitchen is almost completely quiet.

The overhead light underlines the near silence with a constant, almost subsonic buzz. A bug bounces off the window above the sink.

"So..." I'm trying to break the ice, but my words die in my mouth as I realize I don't know what to say. Her head swivels towards me, her brown eyes fixing on mine.

"Yes?" A word. She spoke to me. That's a start.

"I'm glad you're here," I say. I've missed her. Ever since we split apart, something has been missing from my life. I should apologize for what happened, make amends. "Elaine..." Wait, what was it that we broke apart over? For some reason, I can't remember. She is looking at me, head cocked to the side like a puppy, arm now resting against the counter. A stray strand of honey blonde hair hangs from the messy bun on top of her head.

Something seems off. Doesn't Elaine have red hair? A moment after this thought strikes me, her hair shimmers. It's suddenly a deep crimson, like newly spilled blood. She leans towards me across the island, and I can't make myself move away. In the back of my head, something knows that it's not normal for that to happen, that people's hair doesn't just change color. She is still staring at me.

"What is it, Daniel?" Her voice is soft

and low, almost a seductive whisper. "Weren't you saying something, Daniel? What was it, Daniel?" She is leaning across the counter, hand back near the edge while her torso extends through the air over the island towards me. I can't remember how to speak, let alone what I was saying. Her eyes are intent, burning into mine. The silence between us is hard, solid, almost tangible.

Finally, my brain lurches into action as I am struck by a deep sense of terror. I push away from the island, landing on the floor. The back of my head hits the wall, and my vision explodes with stars. When it clears, Elaine is standing. She's next to the island, her back towards me. I push farther against the wall, the only thing running through my head is a feeling of primal horror, like a hunted animal.

She starts to turn her head. I freeze, my breath caught in my throat.

Suddenly, the kitchen window

erupts inwards in a maelstrom of howling winds and shards of glass. I squeeze my eyes shut against the gale force winds and curl up against the wall. I can feel the wind tearing at my clothes, and I try to make myself smaller.

In an instant, the wind is gone. I remain curled up for a moment, before I finally relax. Tentatively, I open my eyes.

There is nothing, only an inky darkness. Elaine and the kitchen are gone. I can feel nothing around me. I try to look around. I can see nothing, not even my own body. I'm not sure if I'm floating. I feel nothing around me, but I have no sense of direction and there is no feeling of movement.

After what could have been a moment or an eternity, I'm overcome with a sense of fatigue. Gradually, I can feel my eyes closing. The last thought I have is of how the action is not really changing anything. ■



# The Taste Of Air

By KIT MEYER

The gray light sifted through the building's smallest third floor window while Jason sat in the furthest corner watching the sun crawl its way in. It was Tuesday. The second day. 2/7, an uneven fraction. *Today. Too day. Too much day.*

Rolling his head to one side and letting out a low grunt, Jason put one hand on the windowsill and lifted himself up. Nearby, the bed frame's white paint coat was chipped and scratched in more places than not. Jason's eyes shut tight, moving his fingers between the smooth patches and rough rusted metal. He liked textures. They made the world feel real.

There was a knock at the door and Jason's head jerked upwards. He grunted.

In came the nurse, whom he only knew by her poorly dyed hair, and she shuffled around the small room checking locks for signs of breakage.

"Good *mor*-ning, *Jay*-son," she said, opening her thin-lipped mouth to emphasize each sound. He shook his head in response and let his eyes focus on a small red speck on the wall.

"It's time for *doc*-tor." She reached

to touch Jason's shoulder but he flinched away. She gestured "Come", leading him beyond the thick windowless door that separated him from the rest of the hallway. Morning sounds rebounded off its walls—metallic bangs and barely audible groans coming from dozens of individual rooms. Jason's head swiveled left and right looking for faces, but just like every other Tuesday it seemed to be a hallway of ghosts.

Then, suddenly, the office—its four beige walls covered in paintings and medical degrees. A sterile smell. Cold to the touch. Strange.

"Patient 762 is here to see you, doctor." The nurse turned to Jason, offering a barely visible smile and, with the quick rustling of her skirt, was gone.

"Quite a record you've got here," he chuckled, returning to his chair and spinning it to face his patient. "And how are you today?" There was no response as Jason traced patterns in the carpet with his eyes. Running a hand through his thinning hair, the doctor sighed with a frown.

"Mute as always, I see. I was hoping

for more progress." He flipped through a few pages. "Nurse?" An older woman dressed in blue appeared in the doorway. "You called, sir?"

"I want you to increase the voltage in this patient's shock therapy. Hopefully that will give more results," he said, glancing at Jason before looking back at the nurse, "otherwise it seems a lobotomy is the only option left."

*Low. Bot. Oh. Me.* The word seemed familiar as if it had been mentioned in hushed conversations that he wasn't supposed to hear. *Low. Boto. Me?*

Like a flash of white light Jason remembered passing a room not long ago, its sign reading "LOBOTOMY LABORATORY, ROOM 313". Scalpels and searing pain. Patients like bags of wet flour. He had heard the screams.

*No.*

With a sudden burst of energy he leaped up from his seat and ran, tumbling over himself and ricocheting back and forth against the hallway walls: past quiet rooms, past rooms so loud no one listened anymore, past LOBOTOMY LABORATORY ROOM 313, past his own tiny cell and far away from the doctor playing God with his brain. He ran until the hallway turned to an unfamiliar corridor with a large, wide window at its end. From a crack in its top left corner he could feel the air. Jason jumped to taste it. ■

"I came here in a sort of existential, self-absorbed state, and it was nice to feed that through nonfiction and self-portrait poetry. This was a great opportunity. I am extremely fortunate to have been able to come here and talk to smart, experienced writers. The editing sessions and author readings were my favorite parts. I genuinely did learn a bunch."

— Zoë Senise





# *Fair Deal*

By JOHANNA MOHRS

Give me a great arching sky  
Succulent August blue,  
And I will trade my father's tears of silver ore,  
The ones that still pool on my shoulder.  
Give me the forbidden taste of dark  
Orchard plums dwindling in my mouth,  
And I will trade the limited edition  
Of my sister's miscarried fifth grade year.  
Offer me a narrow dirt pathway,  
Dragging like a loose thread over the hills,  
And I can pay with my mother's worst day,  
Strung on a necklace of pearls.  
Offer me the sound of a stream,  
Whistling cheerfully on its way to the Rhine,  
And I can pay with my gilded stomach,  
Once too small for food.  
Give me the stench of newly-spread manure,  
And I will trade the silk of sadness, so gentle  
On the skin that it will be a surprise when they diagnose you.  
Give me red poppies dotting the  
Browned face of wheat fields,  
And I will pay with my gemstone eyes, the  
Ones that magnify everything too much.  
Offer me church bells tolling behind,  
Signaling a late-summer wedding,  
And I can pay with the rubies that  
Drooled impatiently from her wrist.  
Offer me a scarf of gauzy  
Wind around my shoulders,  
And I can pay with the wealth of sleepless nights  
Spent gazing out a barred window.  
Give me a walk in the German countryside...  
And I will trade my collected works:  
Authentic, antique, priceless, nonrefundable.  
A complete collection, don't worry.  
Now take it, and go.

# My First Diss

By KRISTIN VON OHLSEN

Water dripped steadily from my hip-length tangled hair and my pink tankini as my friends and I left the pool. In my sixth grade awkwardness, I waddled quickly, shielding my body toward the lounge chair where my belongings lay. Immediately seeking shelter under my giant, yellow blanket, I began to chatter with my buddies.

We were at our sixth grade end-of-the-year party at a day camp in New York, and my posse and I had been travelling in a herd all day; wandering from the photo booth, to the volleyball courts, to the zipline, and finally to the pool. The seven of us, so obnoxiously referred to as “The Gang,” had spent the last two hours immersed in a sweaty and disgusting chlorine bath of pee and band-aids packed with fifty middle schoolers from the surrounding area. Once we decided we were through with Marco Polo and Sharks and Minnows, we went back down to the central field, because we had heard that they were giving out free ice cream.

I didn’t bother to put my clothes on after we exited. I just grabbed my brother’s hand-me-down string bag from the chair on which I had left it, and wrapped myself in the hideously tacky beach towel.

Trudging down to the field, we saw many sights we weren’t used to seeing.

Coming from a well-to-do town in Connecticut, even the most popular and mature Ridgefield kids were confused and bewildered by some of the people we had seen during our six hours at this camp. It was pure culture shock as the Fairfield County kids mixed with some of the New York City and Hartford public school kids. There were high school boys with tattoos and giant crosses hanging from their necks, and girls dressed in too-small bathing suits in which they literally shoved every last slice of their bodies, no matter how fat they looked. There were pimply and slimy middle school boys who kept whistling at me and my friends, and even went so far as to ask my prettiest friend for her number. Like she had a cell phone. She was 11.

As we walked across the field, I kept my eyes down and we stayed in a firm formation. After picking up our ice cream quickly, we found a grassy spot on the hill behind the incredibly unsafe and unreliable Ferris Wheel.

As we slithered over to safety, my friend Megan leaned into my ear and said in a panicked voice, “There are people following us.”

My eyes widened and I turned my head in a dramatic slow-motion way to see a pack of seven or so eighth grade boys walking closely behind us towards the grassy hill. The leader of the group, the one that looked the oldest, caught my eye and smirked.

“Oh. My. God,” I whispered back to Megan as my eyes widened.

Taking charge of the situation, I found the perfect place to park our group on the hill. As we sat, the boys gradually came from behind and sat next to each one of us. Usually, we would all be thrilled to be stalked and chased by boys, but these boys were not the ones we were used to. They were shifty and scary; they were from a different world than we were. They knew it, and we knew it.

The leader sat uncomfortably close to me and started to stare at the side of my face, which I had shielded with my long, dripping brown hair. I ate my ice cream in silence as I ignored him for about 30 seconds.

“I’ve been watching you all day,” the mysterious boy said to me. “Where are you from?”

“Not from here,” I replied in a snide tone.

“I’m not either,” he said in an annoyingly happy voice as he scooted even closer to me.

I could smell him and his dragon breath, a disgusting mix of body odor and cigarettes, blowing on my face and shoulder as he looked at me. Still refusing to make eye contact and avoiding him, I planned my attack in case things got out of hand.

“Can I have some of your ice cream?” he asked mockingly.

My heart skipped a beat as I did

something pretty bizarre for me. I took the ice cream out of my mouth and shoved it straight at his nose, rubbed it there, and ran it down his pristine white t-shirt.

“What the fuck!?” he screamed at me as he leapt up to survey the damage. “You fucking bitch!”

I sat there and smiled as my friends around me broke into an uproar of laughter, laced with confusion, surprise, happiness and pure girl power. The ring leader’s minions backed off my friends, and they retreated quickly as my friend Caroline flashed them double middle fingers. She learned that from her older brothers, and she was pleased to unleash her knowledge. I waved sassily, soaking up the recognition I got from my friends as well as their admiration for me and my bravery.

The boy who got ice cream on him gave me one last death glare as they walked away.

The rest of the day was perfection for me. It didn’t matter that I was severely sunburnt and had a stomach ache later that night from all the crap I had eaten that day. I have never felt more proud of myself.

I never told my parents, since I wasn’t sure how they’d react. I imagined to myself on the bus ride home that I would save this story for a time when I would have a large amount of people to be amazed by it, like at Thanksgiving dinner when I was 35 and had my own family to listen as well.

But as time went on, I became more of the person that revealed herself when she threw the Good Humor bar. I don’t think it would be as shocking for the people around me to hear of my act of courage and defiant feminism today. But in sixth grade, little, meek me... this was a major character development moment. This burst of attitude showed me, for the first time, that I shouldn’t let people control me. I learned that I could stand up for myself and my friends, and that was comforting. People always remember their first kiss, but I think I will remember far more favorably my first diss. ■

# I Quit

By GINA ORLANDI

Madeleine pushed the heavy door open like she did every day, but now for the last time. Stepping into the daylight, she let the rays of sun caress her face. She smiled at the sky; she hadn't felt this good in years.

"What just happened?" Russell's brows raised in confusion as he followed his co-worker out. He was exactly a step and a half behind.

Madeleine turned to him, her smile growing as if she had just realized that outside the mundane realm of fluorescent lights and bleak cubicle walls there were birds and trees and blooming flowers. She finally returned to Russell.

"I'm free. I finally did it. I'm out of this insane asylum for good," she said.

Russell's jaw dropped, but he quickly regained his composure with a thin-lipped gaze. He looked like a disappointed parent, as if he was waiting for her to apologize and march, head bowed, to the corner to lament her mistake.

"So, you finally did it? Quit the job. I know it's been a little stressful but no twenty-five-year-old walks out on a job this good."

Her mind reeled back to a week ago. It was a grim Wednesday morning. Fog hung in the air and she stood with her eyes cast down trying to avoid the casket being lowered into a pit. Her eyes were stinging but as hard as she tried, she couldn't cry. There was no relief. She couldn't make them come. She wasn't close to her father. He was always at one of two places, the factory or drinking at the bar down the street. She'd been working since she was fourteen. She supported her family by chipping in for overdue rent or reluctantly giving a five for gas. *I guess that's where the rat race began*, Madeline realized. She was always searching for the stability her father didn't care about. Seeing him for the first time in two years she felt a pang of sadness as she looked into his pale face. This was it? She felt that he'd wasted his life. And she wasn't about to do the same.

Now she turned to Russell, "Yes. Yes I did quit my job. Ask me again, I love the way it sounds." She had almost reached

her car and the entire walk to the parking lot she hadn't noticed his negativity. She was tired of it all. The dark mornings stumbling from her blaring alarm clock to her dripping coffee machine to her droning conference calls. She was free, thanks to her father. The best thing death can bring is a revelation. She had realized that she was writing her own story and she didn't need to make herself the victim.

"Do you realize the implications that you will—"

She wasn't listening to him. She was thinking of the offer she had received for an internship in Venice a month ago. It barely paid any money. But still, she'd always wanted to work at a bakery. To create something more than her own misery. "By the way, do you know how much plane tickets to Europe go for these days? God, it's been forever since I left this city."

"Um, well, no." Russell mustered, losing his train of thought. "But as I was saying—"

He tried to continue, but she cut him off again. "Oh Russell, don't you see? I don't want to end up like my father. I need to change something about my life."

"Then change something! But quitting your job? It's ridiculous. You can do what you really want when you retire. After three years of working with you I have never questioned your sanity until now."

"Russell, stop looking at me like I've lost my mind and just listen. We could be replaced with a computer-programmed robot and our world wouldn't look any different than it does right now. We could press a few buttons, instruct it to follow our daily routine, and sit back to watch our life pass by. I'm done living like this."

Russell's arms were folded across his chest. He wasn't buying it.

"Just think about it," Madeleine said, her eyes lighting up. "We don't have to be trapped. This is our life and we can do *whatever* we want. The possibilities are endless, and exciting—yet how do we

spend most of our time? Letting the days troop by, sleepwalking through life."

He didn't understand her. His father was a banker and his mother a secretary. He'd grown up comfortable and accustomed to this lifestyle. He asked, "But aren't you scared?"

"Honestly... yes. But that's normal. I've learned that the only thing people are more scared of than wasting their life is uncertainty."

"Well Madeleine, I still think you're a little crazy. Just don't come crawling back to me when you're unemployed and scrounging for money." Russell turned abruptly and walked back in through the tinted door of the towering building.

Madeleine called back to him, "Don't save up everything you want to do for retirement! It's riskier than anything I'm trying to do."

He didn't turn back. He had an appointment to go to and he didn't want to be late.

Backing out of the parking lot, Madeleine watched the hot sun reflect off the outside of the tinted building. The rays of light bounced off the glass in waves, barely letting any sun inside. Looking ahead, her past waving goodbye in the rearview mirror, she began to think that maybe her dad's life wasn't wasted because, after all, she was finally leaving. ■

"I had never been to any sort of writing camp or class before, and it was a great experience. I feel I learned a lot, both from the faculty and from the students, who are all as serious about writing as I am."

— Julia Galasso

# "Do you...love me?"

By GLORIA PARK

When I was eight years old, I was walking home from school with my twin sister. Leading the way, much to my mortification, was my grandma. To this day, I still do not understand why we needed our grandma to escort us from the elementary school right across the street from our house, but she did. Each and every day, without exception, rain or snow. Aware of the judgmental sneers and snickers thrust in our direction, I felt overwhelmingly humiliated that I could not walk home from school on my own, like all the other kids my age. Through some sort of twin telepathy, or perhaps simply the mutual understanding that one gains through a long friendship, I knew my sister felt the same.

"If only I could turn invisible right about now," I muttered under my breath. "Why are my parents so overprotective anyway? They don't need to send Grandma to walk one single freaking block with me. My house is three feet away from the school, for goodness sake."

My twin and I avoided walking alongside or making any sort of contact with my grandma on these daily home-

bound walks. My grandma eventually gave up on making conversation with us. Her short, plump figure waddled several meters ahead, casting longer and longer shadows as the school year drew to a close and summer approached. I kept my distance from even her shadow, not wanting my fellow schoolmates to associate me with her. I never gave much thought as to whether she would mind, because I was always so absorbed wallowing in my own self-pity. Surely, Grandma would understand my subjection to public disgrace. Wouldn't she?

The simple fact that I could not cross the single street that served as a bridge between my school and my house without the guidance of an adult was pure torture, in the eyes of my eight-year-old self. The very presence of a guardian on those walks home from school was like an arrow plunged directly into the bulls-eye of my pride and dignity. But what made the experience even more excruciating was the fact that it was my grandma who escorted Olivia and me to our home. Not my dad, mom, uncle, or even

grandpa. Of course it had to be my grandma, of all people. Her broken English, stagnant odor, drooping wrinkles, forceful hugs, and outdated Oriental clothing caused me to give an even wider berth to her than I would have given to any other escort.

On this particular day, however, as my sister and I trailed behind my grandma, something about the way she held her stiff shoulders and sealed her lips together in a tight, grim line triggered a shrill emergency alarm in my head. *Attention: everybody, please evacuate Grandma-ville and the surrounding area immediately. We predict a wrathful earthquake, and possibly even a tsunami, in the near future.* Boiling tension rolled in tangible waves between her and us. As soon as my twin and I entered the house, our grandma slammed the door behind us. Ka-THUD!

"Sit down," she abruptly commanded, her eyes aflame with fury. Uh oh. Judging from her tone of voice and the fierce anger in her pupils, I knew this was not going to be a pleasant exchange. Immediately, my twin sister, Olivia, and I obeyed her command,

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"I am very thankful for the time I got here at Skidmore. The classes were so different from what I learn in high school, which made the whole thing far more exciting and new. I enjoyed living on the campus and getting a taste of college life and the freedom it gives you. Overall, the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute is a fabulous place to be yourself and discover your potential as a writer while being surrounded by people who understand you."

— Kristin Von Ohlsen

seating ourselves silently on the couch.

For what seemed to be an eternity, the two of us kept our eyes glued to the ground, too petrified to make eye contact with our grandmother. We could feel her flaming eyes bore holes into us. We waited as she collected herself and searched for the words to speak. At last, she slowly asked, with a trembling voice, "Do you... love me?"

Olivia and I looked up at her, stunned. She continued, her voice now steady and gaining heated momentum. "Be honest. Do you truly love me at all? If you loved me, you would show me that you do. I don't sense any warmth from either of you two."

Initially, I was at a loss for word—thoughts, even. Her words resounded in my head, ricocheting off the walls of my mind over and over again. Then, when the shock of her question had worn off and I could formulate thoughts, anger began to seep into my mind. *How could she possibly ask that question? I thought to myself. I'm her granddaughter. Of course I love her!*

Soon the anger morphed into guilt as I realized she must have been

addressing my cold, distant attitude towards her on our daily walks. Suddenly, I felt so ashamed of myself that, this time, instead of wanting to become temporarily invisible, I wished I could simply disappear from the face of the earth altogether and never have to face my grandmother again.

Both Olivia and I hung our heads, unable to meet our grandma's gaze, no longer because of fear, but because of shame. The two of us remained silent for a long, long time, unable to think of any excuses or explanations for our actions, because there were none.

Olivia was the braver one. The first to muster up the courage to speak, she cleared her throat and whispered, "*Halmunee* [Korean for grandmother], *sarang-hamnida* [I love you.]"

Fueled by my sister's bravery, I followed my sister's lead and quietly said the same: "*Halmunee, sarong-hamnida.*" There was a moment of tense silence as we anxiously awaited *Halmunee's* response. Her gaze lingered over us for a few more seconds and then she briskly stood up. She took a few swift strides until she was directly

in front of us. I could not tell whether her fury had subsided or not; she kept her expression smooth and unreadable. I winced, anticipating a slap.

Instead, she embraced us with her sturdy arms. Shocked, I let her warmth encompass me, breathing in her familiar scent of hot cooking oil and sweat. My pangs of guilt became even sharper than before as she repaid my lack of love towards her with unconditional love for me. I knew that inside, she was probably still throbbing with pain from the chagrin and icy unfamiliarity with which I had treated her every day for the past several years. Hot tears stung my eyes as I realized that while I had valued the opinions of strangers and fellow classmates over the emotions of my own grandma, she had always valued me over anyone else in the world. As I buried my head into her embrace, she silently accepted me, notwithstanding how undeserving of her love I was. No words were necessary for me to understand that she had already forgiven me. ■

"Most of my life has been a struggle between my love of writing and my love of technology. I have this need to create, a passion for bringing the things I think about into a physical form. The New York State Summer Young Writers Institute has convinced me that writing will forever be part of that process, and whether or not I write for a living isn't important. What is important is the fact that this Institute has reminded me how wonderful it is to write, and I hope I never stop."

— Ryan Smith



# Rock and a Hard Place

By SAM PINHEIRO

Glenn grips the balaclava in his hands. He feels the frightening, soft texture of the fleece tickling his skin and quickly puts it on. It's like ripping off a Band-Aid. The sooner he gets this over with, the easier it'll be. It's almost one hundred degrees outside and the mask over his head just makes the sweat glands have a field day. The balaclava was almost three dollars, so he hates to get it soiled after one day but it is a necessity.

He steps out of his Camry and slams the door. He's afraid somebody has seen him from the noise but then remembers that slamming a car door isn't suspicious. He's just another guy to everyone else.

*Just another guy in a balaclava...*

He curses and quickly takes it off after that thought, hoping nobody has seen him. It's a two-block walk over to his destination and it wouldn't look very good if he walked in the middle of a city street looking like a murderer.

He arrives at his destination three

minutes later. He steps over to the side in the alley puts the mask on. He's pretty confident nobody has seen him.

*Good. That's exactly the way it's supposed to be.*

He grasps the cold holster of the .38 snub in his waistband. He knows it's there from the sting of the metal but he has to be sure. He's been checking every minute as if it was an engagement ring in his pocket. He had bought it the night before with the intention of using it as an absolute last resort, to wound, of course. If this gun was seen on him and it was noticed that the serial number was filed off...

He tries not to think about it. He takes a gulp of air to clear his mind. *Think confidently. Success will be more probable that way.*

Besides, getting caught for the weapon isn't the crime he's concerned with right now. He feels in his other pocket for the bottle of ether. Knowing that everything's going okay so far gives him a false sense of reassurance.

He goes over to the dumpster and jumps inside. It feels like an oven since it's absorbing all of the direct sunlight but he ignores it. He just peeks outside and waits; waits for his moment to strike. He tries to stay focused on the task at hand but his mind can't help but remember.

*Two weeks earlier ...*

Glenn ran alongside the gurney as Diana was rushed into the hospital. "Don't worry, baby girl. I'm here. You'll be fine."

His daughter's blue eyes were translucent and showed absolutely no emotion. He wasn't even sure if she recognized him. Blood was spilling out of her nose and all over her face. The thick, crimson liquid almost

made it look like she was dead. He swallowed his fear and took a gulp of air to calm down. As soon as she's rushed past a set of twin doors into an emergency room, a doctor held him back.

"Sir! A doctor yelled. "Please wait a minute!"

"No! I have to see her!"

"She'll be *fine*." Those words snap him back into reality for a moment. If only he knew back then how wrong she was. Or how gullible he was. It was some bullshit phrase that doctors tell every family member to calm him or her and keep the hospital an orderly place. "I need you to fill out this sheet. Okay?" She handed him a piece of paper and a clipboard. "Start with what happened."

"She...she fell down the stairs this morning. I don't know why she's bleeding so much. It won't stop..."

"Sir. Please just wait here a minute. We'll update you as soon as possible."

Glenn sat down and filled out as much of the clipboard as he could. He waited there for another two hours, tapping his feet with apprehension. As the clock ticks by, he can't help but think of his wife.

*If only Teri's plane could get here faster...*

A doctor stepped out. He recognized her as the one from earlier. "Diana? I-Is she okay?"

"I'm afraid that I have some bad news. We didn't know what was wrong so we decided to take some tests and..."

The next three minutes were a lot of medical jargon in which he could extrapolate just enough information to know what was going on. "Your daughter has an abnormally large tumor growing in her brain. The reason she was bleeding so much is because her platelets are dangerously low and so her blood doesn't clot easily. The tumor is in almost every nook and cranny of her brain. To be perfectly honest here... from my professional opinion, we're at a loss. We have a few surgeons who might be able to get the job done

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but...it's unlikely?"

Glenn sat down and put his hands to his face. No tears came out. He had absolutely no idea what to think. He was so shocked that this could happen to him. A thought about something like this had come here and there but he always thought the same thing: *This could never happen to me.*

He took another gulp of air to clear his mind and called his wife again.

He walked into his daughter's room after a few minutes. Her nose was in a bandage and both of her eyes were so black that she almost resembled a blonde raccoon. Yellow-green splotches bordered the edges of her bruises.

"Daddy..." She croaks.

"Hey, sweetheart. Don't worry. I'm here. I'm here. You'll be *fine*."

His wife arrived soon after. She looked like a complete mess with her hair and clothes strewn all about. A lot after that was a blur. She saw Diana and talked to him for a while until the big news came.

"I talked to Mike about some brain

surgeons," she said. "He gave me a few names and I narrowed them down to one. His name is Dr. Schwartz. He's in California. He's a specialist with these kinds of things. The absolute best."

"Then what's the problem? How can we..." He trailed off. "How much?"

"Four hundred thousand. He's out of our health insurance. We'd have to pay for this out of pocket."

"Shi-it's okay...we can put a mortgage on the house and..."

"We already have two, which we won't be able to pay off for thirty years."

"I can get a third job. I can..."

"Honey, no. We can't do this to ourselves."

"What the hell is wrong with you? She's dying and there's nothing that you're willing to do about it?"

"I don't know what we can do. We have seven thousand dollars between the both of us. We're living conservatively enough as it is. If we sold *everything* we had, and I do mean *everything*...right down to the clothes on our backs, we wouldn't even get half that much."

"Are you insane? This is our daughter for Christ's sake! A-Are w-we supposed to just r-roll over and let her die?!"

"No. Just Dr. Schwartz isn't an option. We have to let the doctors here operate on her. A few of them have dealt with similar operations and they have been successful."

"Were you listening to them? T-They're amateurs! They can't do this!"

"We don't have another option. We can't afford Dr. Schwartz. We just have to pray and hold onto as much hope as we can. This is out of our hands. We

need to trust that they'll be able to do this. It'll be fine."

Glenn was at a loss for words. He stomped out of the waiting room and leaves Teri alone. He knew that the doctors there wouldn't be able to perform the surgery successfully. He needed Diana in California and not this worthless Brooklyn hospital.

To think that was two weeks ago. He takes slow breaths in and out but the smell of the dumpster is unbearable. He swallows a gulp of air and brings his water bottle out. He takes a sip and splashes the rest across his face. The balaclava soaks it up and cools him down a little. His mind is a little clearer.

He looks back at the building. The East Bank. He doesn't know how much money is inside, but he hopes it's enough. It has to be.

He waits an hour outside of the building. Every moment he's outside, he starts thinking of everything that could possibly go wrong. He keeps trying to raise his confidence and slowly realizes that this isn't going to work.

Just as he thinks that, a bag of trash smashes across his body. He nearly lets out a startled yelp but covers his mouth. He peeks outside and sees a man walking away. He wears a bank teller uniform. Glenn slowly slips out of the dumpster and puts his gun to the back of the teller's head.

"Don't. Move." Glenn orders. He tries to sound intimidating but a slight quiver in his voice escapes. He prays to God the teller didn't notice.

"Please. D-Don't. I have money. I have a lot of money."

"I don't want YOUR money." He takes the safety off of his gun and pulls the hammer back. The teller noticeably cringes when he hears the hammer being pulled back.

"You're going to do what I say if you want to live. Got it?" His voice is no longer nervous. It's filled with power as if pulling the hammer back on the gun filled him with a new sense of confi-

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dence; true confidence, completely different from what he's been trying to fill himself with for the past hour.

"O-Okay."

"Take out your phone."

The teller complies. "Dial your boss. Tell him you're not going back to work. Tell him whatever you want. . .with some limitations of course. If I don't like what I hear, you're dead."

"Yeah. Sure. Just give me a second." The teller takes out a bottle of anti-anxiety pills from his pocket and swallows a few. He dials his phone and puts it to his ear. "Fred...I'm not coming back to work today. I'm feeling a bit under the weather. I'll barely be able to walk back home. Just...I'll be back tomorrow. I'm sorry." He hangs up.

"Was that any good?"

"Perfect."

"Will you let me go?"

"No. Now we wait."

Glenn waits for a few hours until the bank closes. He waits for a few more afterwards just to be safe. The entire time, he has his gun pointed right at the teller's back. The strain in his arm is unbearable but he keeps it leveled the entire time.

"It's time. Let's go."

He takes the teller to the front of the bank. The teller knows what to do without direction now. He takes out his keys and unlocks the door. They both walk inside the completely silent bank. The cold tiles and stones make it feel like a mausoleum. Every single footstep echoes throughout the area.

"Open the vault."

"I have to get the key from my desk."

"Fine. If I see you touch that silent alarm, though, you're dead." He doesn't even know if there is a silent alarm, but he's seen enough movies to assume that there is one.

The teller gets the keys out and walks over to the vault. He twists the iron bars and it slowly creaks open. Glenn puts the gun down for a second and takes the ether out and pours some on a rag. As the teller strains to open

the vault all the way, Glenn puts the rag over the teller's face. The teller struggles briefly but then passes out and becomes dead weight in Glenn's arms. He would've hit him with the gun but he didn't want to give the teller any pain or a concussion. The poor soul had done enough.

He goes over to the vault and takes his duffel bag out. He throws the exact amount of money he needs in the bag. No more, no less. When he finally finishes, the bag weighs roughly the same as a pumpkin.

He quickly runs out of the bank and hears sirens in the distance. Despite the warning about the silent alarm, it seems as if the teller has disobeyed him.

Glenn begins to run to the car about two blocks away. The sirens sound so far away that he knows he'll make it. He'll be just fine. Nobody has seen his face. The teller didn't get any more than glances at his physique. The IRS would question how he got the money for the surgery eventually but by then it'd be too late. Diana would be alive and that would be all that mattered.

As he runs away, he takes off the balaclava since it restricts his vision when combined with the night. As he takes it off, he trips over a fire hydrant and falls straight to the ground. His face smashes against the pavement, his nose bursts, and the stacks of money in the bag he neglected to zip fall out.

He groggily gets up and feels his nose. A lot of blood is spilling out. He uses his balaclava to dab it up off of the sidewalk and wipes as much as he can off of his face. He rushes to gather the money back up and quickly checks the bag. The count is off. He's missing a stack.

Glenn looks up and sees a boy. The boy sees him. He's about nine years old and has a mess of blonde hair, just like Diana. He's covered in mud and grass stains as if he'd just finished playing around with his friends all day. And now, he's staring at a man with a duffel bag full of money with a face covered in blood. The boy's ears are pricked

towards the siren in the distance. He holds a stack of the money in his hands.

The weight in the duffel bag feels much heavier as Glenn thinks about what could happen next. He could leave and if the child saw the news, he could just piece two and two together and give Glenn's face to a sketch artist. Then again, how good could the memory of a child be? Glenn could threaten him but then he could fear for his life and provoke him to call the police. As he goes through all of the scenarios, he realizes that there are too many 'ifs'. There's only one situation where the child stays alive and Diana gets her surgery, and that doesn't seem like a likely one.

The child drops the money, pivots, and begins to run away. Glenn thinks about fate and how ironic all of this is. If he doesn't kill this child, he will be arrested, his money will be confiscated, he wouldn't be able to live with himself, and Diana will die. If he kills him, Glenn could likely get away and pay off Diana's hospital bills, but he couldn't live with himself. It's like God put this child on Earth to test him. The circle of life. A child for a child. Somebody has to die. If he ponders any longer, the child would be long gone and he wouldn't be able to successfully shoot him.

Glenn closes his eyes, takes a gulp of air, and ponders everything one last time. He thinks of what his most rational decision will be. After a final second, the clouds in his mind part and he knows exactly what he's going to do. ■

"It was a great experience and I will go home knowing considerably more than I did before."

— Jane Song



# The Salvation of Mankind

By SOPHIA SCANLON

I imagine for a moment that it is a Sunday afternoon in April. I am at my grandparents for Easter. They live in Amish country, a fact that in itself is an anomaly, seeing as both of them avidly despise anything with a beard longer than the tooth of a rat-tail comb. The lawn is soggy; each shoot of grass that springs forth from the soil is like cereal that has soaked in milk for far too long. I am inside, my knees folded onto the blue sofa that has smelled of syrupy French perfume and mold for probably the last thirty-seven years. I would like to go outside, but my mother has forbidden me.

“You’ll get your pretty new dress wet!” she exclaims. I am wearing an oddly shaped velvet sheet, a cluster of lacey and impractical roses climbing up the sides in delicate vines. The “dress” as my mother so names it, cannot be to its own definition a dress. What I am wearing now, on the cerulean couch, on this particular Sunday afternoon in April, could effectively be called a smock, a bag, a miniscule Russian country even, but a dress? Nay, my prepubescent skeletal body could not hold the shape of a dress. My elbows stick out from the smooth fabric in sharp angles, repulsive flesh that stretches too tight over my bones. I am hot and the velvet scratches the wrong way on my bare skin. Outside the rain falls in frigid sheets.

My cousins are by the coffee table, carefully placing an array of brightly colored puzzle pieces in varying shades upon the clear glass. It is one of those one-thousand-piece puzzles. The box cover depicts the completed puzzle, a frost-covered field, rich green pine trees heavy with perfectly sculpted snow. In the center of the pasture a fox wades, his silky black paws kicking up in a spray of perfectly shaped crystal fog. In the distance the warmly lit outline of a cottage puffs smoke merrily into the twilight. I imagine there is a farmer in the cottage, a farmer who has just come home and stomped his boots off in the mudroom. I imagine he has a round wife and stained mugs of cider waiting

for him inside.

My mother is calling my name, “Sophie, come wash your hands.” She hollers through the wall of the kitchen. I can’t imagine why she wants me to wash my hands. She denied my entrance to the soggy lawn after all. Hands only needed to be washed after they get dirty. Not before. But I cannot put up a fight in Amish country.

I wash my hands with the sugary soap. After further inspection I learn the concoction is called *watermelon candy*. After further inspection, I learn it does not taste as the label suggests.

Now Easter dinner has commenced. My grandfather sits at the head of the table, praying over the food.

“Bless, O Lord, this creation that it may be a means of salvation to the human race.” His lips warble as he speaks and I cannot understand why the overcooked string beans his gnarled claw hovered over was the salvation to the human race.

There are dishes and bowls steaming high with peppered and creamy mashed potatoes. A silver platter is piping hot piled high with rosemary lamb and I can already smell the sour cherry pie, growing in the oven. But I am hot. My brow is already saturated in salty sweat

and I can already smell my armpits, that half smell of old Fritos and rotting wood after it rains. I launch myself towards a mysterious basin of beans. I pile my plate high with the stuff.

It is cold in my mouth and although it tastes distinctly of vinegar and masking tape all my mind can register is *cold* and I shovel the stuff down my gullet. I feel the gluey substance slide down my throat just as my mother’s voice yells “Sophie!” I feel a crunch in my mouth, a horribly sickening crunch of an almond. My neck snaps up with the thrill of an arrow. The Easter table is now hushed, my grandfather’s knobbed fingers still float over the string beans. Nothing stirs. The red fox on the cover of the puzzle box is paralyzed, staring at me from a snow-dusted horizon. Already my throat is closing; filling with what I know is yellowish mucus. I cannot breathe now, and my vision is full of spots and globs where the candlelight does not penetrate. I could feel hands groping under my sweaty armpits.

That was the last time we celebrated Easter in Amish country. My mother always said it was because of my near-death almond experience. I say it was because she didn’t let me play outside in the soggy cold. ■



# Skrinnies

By ZOË SENISE

There hasn't been much romance in my life, but when there was it has always been tied to music in some way. Chris and I got to know each other through music, primarily, taking our relationship further from the state between acquaintances and friends.

We were on the way back from a fire drill when it began; Chris approached me as the herd walked slowly around the building to get back inside. "Hey Zoe, so I was talking to Ben and he's thinking about Battle of the Bands and how there won't be as many bands this year as there were last year because a lot of them graduated already. Anyway, he told me that you play music and that we should do something together because he already has George." Ben's band was named 'George' and sometimes 'George and His Handsome Devils,' the joke being that no one in the band was named George.

"That would be cool. What instrument do you play?"

"Guitar. How about you?"

"Also guitar... but we'll figure it out."

"Yeah we'll figure it out."

We named our band 'Skrinnies' after

a made up religion our philosophy teacher had invented and used as an example when talking about the ontological argument for the existence of God. Skrinnies met most days after school in the classroom across the hall from the English department's room. The classroom was chosen for its convenience; Mr. Copenhafer would often lend us the amps and plugs that he kept behind his desk, in the corner of the English department. The two songs we had decided on were "In the Aeroplane Over the Sea" by Neutral Milk Hotel, and "Bonzo Goes to Bitburg" by the Ramones.

Walking down the halls with Chris and our guitars, gave me a bizarre sense of pride. We are very similar people; it was obviously pleasing to the teachers to see us together—even as friends. This became especially obvious at Battle of the Bands, when Skrinnies finally played their two songs together. The first song was our serious song "In the Aeroplane Over the Sea." We divided the vocals between us singing some parts together and others separately. *Hear her voice as it's rolling and ringing through me, soft and sweet, how the notes*

*all bend and reach around the trees.* I had to tune my guitar to his voice so it didn't crack on the words 'soft and sweet'. Next we played our Ramones song, spurring on the crowd with our attempt at rage against Ronald Reagan. *See through you like cellophane you watch the world complain, but you- do it! Anyway! Who am I am I to say?* Skrinnies were a success.

I didn't see Chris for a while after Battle of the Bands; classes ended and our communication was limited to sending each other songs to listen to, and discussing the fate of Skrinnies now that Battle of Bands was over. I finally saw him again at the math final. He had left before me, so I walked around the school aimlessly when I got out, assuming he had gone home. It wasn't until I was in the elevator that I saw the message from Chris.

"Meet me at Wontons."

I speed-walked to Wonton's, awkwardly skipping and running at intervals to get to my destination faster. I finally was proximate enough that I could see him through the dirty windows of the small Chinese restaurant.

*continued on page 47*



"I have come back for my second year at the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute, and it's a valuable and unique experience to hear stories and to share them with other young writers."

— Madison Hughes

Inside it smelled like a summer camp cafeteria, but had still a sense of comfort that was inevitably manifested after three years of going there.

I got to Chris's table, but he didn't see me because he was carefully dissecting one of his vegetable dumplings with two chopsticks. "Hey there." I tried not to scare him or shock him. He looked up and smiled at me, showing my two favorite teeth of his on each side of his mouth. He said hello back to me, so I sat down across from him.

We talked platonically, thinking of mindless conversation in order to keep up our company without silences or gaps. Our conversation drifted into South America as he asked me about Brazil. I showed him Caetano Veloso's "Alegria, Alegria" explaining to him that it was the first song that incorporated electric guitar into Brazilian samba and folk music. *O sol se reparte em crimes, espaconaves, guerrilhas, Em cardinales bonitas, Eu vou...* I tried to whisper and mouth along to the words so that he could enjoy the original version.

After Wonton's, as we stuttered about our next plans, I finally invited him to the piers to further our time together. The walk to Gantry was long, and he told me about the existential crisis he had in the supermarket the day before with when he went with his mom.

"There's a song about that." I thought he knew.

"What song?"

"That song by The Clash—'I'm All Lost in the Supermarket.'" I pulled out my music player and put the earphone in his ear. *I'm all lost in the supermarket I can no longer shop happily I came in here for a special offer—a guaranteed personality.* He began to smile and I could see the pointed tips of the fang *Long distance callers make long distant calls! and the silence makes me lonely.* Now he laughed, and we stood so close to each other that I could feel the energy pushing off his skin meet that which exerted off me. We continued walking towards the park, occasionally brushing arms in a secretly conscious way. I led



"This is the second year that I've attended the Institute, and I loved it. I feel like I've really grown as a writer as a result. It's also given me a great community of people who are interested in the same things that I am and who are supportive of each other's writing."

— Tara Cicic

him down to the rocks beside the piers of Long Island City, and we sat on concrete around the base of a massive black structure that read "LONG ISLAND" in red carnival letters. I tossed a cigarette filter into the water.

"I hope a duck doesn't choke on it," he said, dividing his attention between that thought, my company, and his strong gaze into the water, as though he had a relationship with it.

A few hours went by while we talked about our parents and stepparents, until finally getting on the subject of Charles Manson. We talked about the speeches he gave, and the sense of guilt we shared for enjoying his speeches. Chris had never heard Manson's music. I used Charles Manson to bring myself closer and play his song "Look At Your Game Girl." We were arm to arm, shoulder to shoulder, listening to the beautiful words of the mass murderer, to cover up our own motives. *What a mad delusion, livin' in that con-*

*fusion. Frustration and doubt... Can you ever live without the game? The sad sad game.* The song eventually finished but to stretch the moment I changed it to Manson's "Home is Where You're Happy" accidentally exposing the state of my trembling hand. *So burn all your bridges and leave your whole life behind... You can do what you want to do 'cause your strong in your mind.* Charles Manson's music is nice when you can separate it from the man.

"Look at those window washer workers in the distance" he says an excuse to lean against me. I took that advantage too. We sat closer now, to get a better view of the tiny figures across the street at the top window of the building. *Just as long as you got love in your heart you'll never be alone.* The window washers sat on a little ledge wearing harnesses. Manson's words began to fade more; *you'll never be alone, no no no...*

"I kind of like you." ■

# The Untold Story of the Stepwitch

By RYAN SMITH

A long time ago I broke the rules. Cherished rules, sacred laws that the supernatural beings of the world have followed since the inception of the world. I received no trial; I was banished, a sentencing more demeaning than death. Bound forever to a small forest cabin, I was completely alone and isolated. For centuries I was devoid of any contact. Humanity had simply not ventured far enough into the forest to provide me any companionship. It's true witches prefer silence and privacy from the affairs of lesser beings, but life loses purpose with no one to talk to. The silence was deafening, and I eventually gave up on the chance to be happy. What was the point? My seclusion was absolute, and my future had long withered away.

My name is Helia, I'm the forgotten witch of the forest, and this is how I came to be reborn.

The day began as any other; I sat on the porch and loathed my life, keeping my ears open for any rodents that could become my next meal. Staring into the thicket, I suddenly heard a loud crash, followed by the forest's sigh as the sound dissipated and silence retook its domination.

"Just a fallen tree. Perhaps an animal knocked it down, or an old tree lost its footing," I said to myself. "Nothing to get excited over."

Then, another crash, this one closer and in a new direction. Now I became curious. I refused to get too excited, but the sound was enough for me to leave my porch and begin sneaking through the trees towards the sound's direction. A witch's eyesight is, on the scale of things, atrocious, so I relied on the sound of my footsteps to guide me along. Because of this, I did not see the clearing till it was right in front of me, and I only stopped inches before the cover of darkness would have disappeared and my presence become known to the man in the clearing.

Oh, did I not mention the man in the clearing?

He was the first man I had seen for

longer than I could possibly remember, and the sight of him might as well have been my first viewing of any creature further evolved than a squirrel. I wanted so much to launch myself out of hiding, to jump out and grab him. It sounds foolish, I know. But my excitement was euphoric, and I stared at this glorious man through the greenery with lustful red eyes.

The longer I watched, the more desperate I became, until every fiber of my being yearned to simply walk up and say hello.

But I couldn't.

"Not like this," I muttered to myself. "No man would dare talk to an ugly old witch, let alone fall in love with one."

Call it desperation, call it a mistake, but the excitement of seeing a human after so long alone had solidified into desire. I was willing to do anything just for the chance to be with him. Anything.

And so I hurried back to my cabin, with the light of the afternoon sun bathing the path in cheerful light. My place of imprisonment had become my greatest tool, providing every ingredient I would need for the most important spell of my life. I decided while making my way back home: I would become human.

Raiding my drawers and cupboards for the necessary items, I paused in shock at what I had already committed to doing. Give up immortality just to meet someone? I knew nothing about him, and yet the mere chance to meet this man was somehow worth the sacrifice. My life as a witch had ended long ago, and this man was a sign that I could begin a new life. A happy life.

By dawn the concoction was complete, and the only step now was to drink it. As I brought the cup closer to my mouth, I felt the warm promise of the future. The glass touched my lips, and I looked at my distorted reflection in the bottom. My red eyes peered back, and I saw the fear that burned inside me. I broke another rule of the witches.

We're not supposed to be scared.

I swallowed, and everything

went dark.

The next morning I followed the path of fallen trees and sad stumps until I came across a beautiful little home, tastefully placed where the man had no doubt labored for days to clear out.

"It seems rather large to house one man... but then again the only home I've ever known was my small cabin," I thought to myself.

Then came the door. I had crossed his lawn, climbed his steps and sneaked onto his porch. It suddenly occurred to me that in all of my worrying and visualizing this precise moment, I never once considered what the hell I was going to say. Hello? How are you? Should I fake being lost? Say I followed him home?

Sweat gathered on my brow, my mind raced through an incalculable number of scenarios, ever more desperate and depressing. My hand was frozen at the door. The warmth I felt from the glass dissolved and left only a paralyzing cold.

And then the door disappeared. I blinked. And there he was.

He had seen me emerge from the woods and come up to his porch, at which point he waited patiently by the door for a knock—a knock which never came. With concern he looked out the window to see a beautiful woman frozen, as if turned to wax. He opened the door and found me, my face full of fear and astonishment.

"You look like you've just seen a witch! Are you ok?"

I smiled.

"I'm fine, really," I said, still timid.

"You look so pale though, please come in. Do you fancy tea?"

And so I met Theodore, the man I had waited centuries for. I found myself tripping over sentences, but Theodore would only laugh and help me regain my thoughts.

"Holy crap, he thinks I'm cute!" I yelled in my head, allowing myself full freedom to feel every human emotion my heart desired. I felt my heart pound-

*continued on page 49*

ing, but as the sun began to hide behind the skyline made rough by the tops of trees, my spirit eased and I began to be comforted by Theodore's smooth voice.

As dusk set in, there was a knock at the back door. It startled me, but Theodore pardoned himself and left the room as if it was routine.

"I knew it. It's his wife. He's married and this was all a mistake and everything is ruined and I'm going to be so embarrassed and this is terrible and all my worse fears have come true—"

The laughter of children suspended my breakdown. Suddenly, a boy and girl of similar age came running into the small living room where I was sitting, and stood marveling in the doorway.

"Dad! There's a pretty lady in the living room!" yelled the boy.

Theodore stepped up behind them, placing his hands on both their shoulders simultaneously.

"These are my children, Helia. This is Hansel, and this is Gretel. Say hi, you two."

"Hello," they said timidly, Gretel's bangs blocking her face while Hansel sank into his father.

"Helia, the sun's gone down. I insist you stay the night. You can take my room and I'll set up down here on the couch."

"Your room?" I asked, hoping the tone of my voice would hint to him my true question of "are you married or not you tease?"

"I'm a single father, Helia. No woman is going to come through the door. In fact, you're the first."

So I stayed the night. And then the next. And then the whole week, and so the days melted together. I started off as more of a babysitter than love interest, but the isolation of the woods eventually brought me and Theodore to be very close. Soon he had moved back to his own bed, but I remained. We were married later that year, in the clearing where I had first laid eyes on the man for whom I had waited for my entire banishment.

We were happy. I wasn't thrilled with the concept of sharing Theodore's attention with his children, but I didn't mind;

I felt wanted, especially by Theodore, but even the kids seemed to at least be pleased with my presence.

But one year, the rain never came.

At first it was fine, the men in the city said the rain would come soon and Theodore had long been storing food in preparation for such an event. Weeks went by, and food started to run short. We could help our supply of food with the garden Theodore kept as a hobby, but with no water even those plants began to die. With no food in town, the entire area began to starve.

I had some residual supernatural tendencies, including a strong life force, which allowed me to survive on less, but even I began to feel the effects of my new human body. Hunger pains, spells of dizziness, and insomnia plagued all of us. Every day I saw Theodore sneak some of his dinner into his pocket and give it to Hansel and Gretel before bed. He was the thinnest of all of us, he ate less than I did most nights, and he labored in the forest as if he was perfectly healthy. It was killing him.

"I'm not going to let some stupid human fault like hunger ruin my happy life. I can't watch my love wither away like this," I thought as I laid in bed one night, staring at the ceiling waiting for the latest bout of pain to stop. "I have to save him."

I left the bed and went to the storage closet. There was enough food for myself and Theodore, but not for the kids.

"Hansel and Gretel..."

All I ever wanted was Theodore. I chose this life for HIM, the children were the unexpected surprise. I liked them well enough, but... they were expendable.

"We have to!"

"I will not let my children die so that I can live!"

"But you must! They are children, Theodore, useless mouths to feed. You, us, we matter."

"You're crazy. They're my kids!"

"And I'm your wife. We can't all survive."

"Helia..."

"We have no choice. Either you and I survive, or we all die. We must choose the lesser of two evils. I'll even do it for you, lead them into the forest for the elements to take care of them."

"No. I'll do it myself."

"Whatever you want."

He looked so pale, not just from malnourishment but from his extreme guilt.

"I'm sorry honey. So, so sorry. But I love you too much to let you die. You're too important."

While Theodore was 'taking care of the kids,' I waited in the living room, the same seat I had sat in the first time I met Theodore. I stared at the floor, stricken with guilt and upset that Theodore had insisted on going alone. Suddenly, I heard the door open and Theodore walked in. He didn't say anything, walking right past me and sitting down at the kitchen table. I felt terrible.

"You alright?" I asked.

"No" he answered, his hand falling from the table to his side.

He looked so sad. Unbelievably sad in fact, so much so that even my witchy heart ached in solidarity.

"I'm sorry. You know I am, right? I didn't want it to happen this way, but I'm glad we can be together."

"I'm going to go to bed."

I nodded. It wasn't worth the fight. He would sleep tonight and over time feel better. He'd accept it, learn to live with it, and soon we would be happy.

That was, until I heard the sound of little feet on the floor.

"How did they get back Theodore!?"

I yelled, slamming the bedroom door with all my strength.

"I swear I don't know! I didn't lead them home I'm telling you!"

"Then how?!"

"I have no idea."

He was smiling, that weakling. I knew it, he still loved his kids more than he loved me. He was happy the children had come home, thrilled that he didn't have to be guilty of their death.

"We'll do it again."

*continued on page 50*

"Please, no."

"We have to, Theodore. Take them deeper into the forest, deeper than they've ever been before. Make sure they never come back, no matter how much they wander."

"Fine."

But there was no way I was going to rely on nature this time around. Oh, no. I couldn't trust Theodore either. I would have to do everything myself. If those children were going to die, I was going to have to kill them.

Once Theodore had left for the second time to take the kids away, I ventured to my old witch's cabin. The building was falling apart. Vines and plants covered the door, windows, and floor. I knew what I had to do. If I was going to kill these kids, I would need to do it as quickly and as easily as possible. And who knows how to kill children better than a witch?

I was able to reverse the witch-human transformation to turn myself back into a witch. I felt the emotion leave my heart and my warm blood run cold. My eyesight faded, my sense of smell heightened, and I suddenly became aware of how terribly the cabin reeked.

I used another spell to create a grand illusion, making the cabin appear it was made of desserts. If the kids were starving to death in the forest, what better way to attract them than with sweets? It was only a matter of time before I heard them outside, those filthy children whose gluttony had made my husband so thin. I watched them approach, attempting to make myself hate them as much as possible so that killing them would be easier. But when I opened the door and welcomed them in, I couldn't do it. I was ready to strike them down in the doorway, but I suddenly found myself feeding them at the table and getting beds ready for them.

"What is wrong with me?" I wondered as I fluffed Gretel's pillow. "I have to kill them. I have to." I looked out the door and saw them, sitting at the table eating. They were pretty cute. "Stop it! You've been a mother too long Helia. You need to remember the joy of being evil."

And yet, an hour later, I was sitting on my porch in the black of night with two kids I promised myself I would kill sleeping in the side room.

The next morning I walked into their room as they slept, grabbed them, and threw them into separate cages. I ignored their screams, their cries of mercy. I threw Hansel into a box with a single slit, and Gretel I chained to the wall.

"Help!" Gretel screamed. "Dad, Mom, please help us!"

"...Mom?" I asked, turning back towards the little girl struggling for freedom. Gretel suddenly went stiff and looked at me in pure terror.

"What?" She asked.

"Your stepmother?" I answered, trying to figure out what she had said.

"She's not our stepmother. She's the only mom we've ever had. What did you do to her?! And where's Dad?!"

I turned around before she could see the tears fall from my eyes. I ran, all the way outside, down the steps and to the forest border.

"I can't do it. I can't, I just can't," I said to myself, gripping a tree for support. "It's too much."

Then I thought of Theodore, and about him starving to death in my arms, and I pulled myself together. It had to be done, and for my own sanity, it had to be done soon.

But as usual, every time I readied myself to kill them I couldn't finish the job. I just kept them in my house, indefinitely held captive, for days. I started to think what Theodore was doing, after killing his own kids and returning home to an empty house. What if he had left, gone into town and left my life forever? The thought of spending another day as a witch was too much, and I decided to kill the kids that night.

In order to become a human again, I needed many ingredients for the spell. The first time had been easy, but going from witch to human and back again had taken a toll on my body. I had to tweak the spell to be stronger in order to ensure my own safety. This time, the most difficult to find ingredient was also the most important; I needed the soul of

an innocent human. "Handy," I thought to myself. "I happen to have two right here." Additionally, my need for their soul was great inspiration to kill them.

And so I readied my pot and prepared the spell, adding every ingredient except for the coveted soul. I still felt bad about the entire thing, and therefore distanced myself from it by forcing Gretel to prepare much of the spell. Once everything was ready I fetched Hansel, dragging him out of his cell and over to the pot. I bent over to turn over the coals and keep the water boiling, and all of the sudden my feet were no longer beneath me. As I fell towards the fire, I turned to see Gretel's foot recoiling, her face pure fear, and then I felt my body begin to burn. But then, a familiar feeling. The same wonderful, humanizing feeling I felt when I had first become human.

"Impossible!" my mind raced as my body was consumed. "It needed an innocent soul, how could it be working?"

I then realized whose soul the spell had accepted.

As I died, I realized that the universe had forgiven me. The cosmos understood me, and had deemed me innocent. I felt my guilt leave me, and at the same time I felt terrible for trying to kill these kids who had accepted me as their mother. As my witch form dissolved into my human one, the fire began to actually hurt, the human body far less resilient.

My last action as a witch was a small spell, made out of what remained of my life force. I turned every strange ingredient and item which inhabited my drawers into precious stones and pearls.

The kids would no doubt search the cabin for food, and upon finding the valuables they would be saved from their suffering. And so would Theodore. Enough money to never chop another tree, never again feel the pains of hunger. The thought was sweet, beautiful, and as the darkness overtook my sight I saw Theodore holding Hansel and Gretel, standing over a small mound in the backyard, tears running down each of their faces.

"My family." ■

# No Trespassing

By JANE SONG

Welcome to Eagleton  
Where our kids are neglected  
And spoiled rotten  
Bodies preserved  
In our basement freezers  
And guns hidden in the night stand drawer  
We've got  
Cookie cutter houses and cookie cutter people  
Moms in SUVs  
Who "just came from the gym"  
In perfect makeup and sunglasses and  
Lululemon athletic gear  
Dads with  
Six-figure salaries  
And taupe leather seats  
They make it to Son's  
Baseball games  
And Daddy's girl's cheer competitions  
Why learn Spanish?  
You need some way to communicate with your gardener  
Welcome to Suburbia  
Be sure to take a complimentary muffin basket on your way out

"I am extremely grateful to have spent ten days at this program. Before this week, I didn't know very many people who were passionate about writing and who would inspire me to continue. I have never met so many creative and talented people. They have left an imprint on my life. The classes were fascinating, the teachers brilliant. This program has introduced me to so many new ideas, people, and sources of inspiration. This short time will resonate with me for years to come and will be extremely valuable to me as a writer."

— Gina Orlandi



# From the Diary of a Witch

By JUSTIN SUNG

January 3, 1345 10:34 A.M.

Life in the woods is dreadful and painstaking. Why do I choose to live here you ask? Well, it isn't a choice at all. Long ago, I ruled over this forest receiving all that I could ever ask for with the terrible might of my magic. However, I was blinded by arrogance and believed that I was invincible. Therefore, I was oblivious to the meddling woman who was able to reduce me to the pitiful thing that I am now, Zelda. That blasted sorceress caught me off guard and cast a spell on me that had been specifically designed for me. Using one of my hairs, the spell was able to lower my magical capability. After suffering the agonizing pain of losing my powers, I could only cast a few basic spells. In addition to losing my powers, my glorious fortress was transformed into a pitiful shack made entirely of food. This leads me to the next part of the curse. The curse caused me to feel agonizing hunger at all times while not being able to quench it. If I tried to take a bite out of my shack, I would suffer a painful death. This torture was designed to be a punishment for all the crimes I had committed against the people of the forest and it was working. But I have learned to survive my curse by using the basic spells that I have been limited to for basic needs such as bathing, utilities, and most importantly, food.

However, surviving is not how I plan to spend my eternity. Over the years, I have obsessed over discovering a cure, and last night, I finally found it! The spell that would restore my magical powers allowing me to undo the wretched spell that has tormented me for so long. However, there is one grave issue. The cure requires the soul of an innocent person trapped in the ashes of their burnt corpse. The only problem with this is that when I was defeated, my subjects fled and the woods have been more or less abandoned. Finding an innocent soul is nearly impossible. Being so close but so far at the same time infuriates me to no end.

January 10, 1345 12:23 A.M.

It's a miracle! I was returning from a hunting trip when I found two children, a boy and a girl, right at my front door. As I hid in the bushes and examined them, I noticed two very important things. Firstly, the boy was the only one of the two who had eaten anything from my house, and secondly, both of them looked starved and each had a wolfish element to them. Using their hunger to my advantage, I easily lured them into my home with promises of food. Once they were inside, I sprung my trap. I used a spell that I had developed to manipulate the food from my house within the boy's body to take control of his mind. I forced him into knocking his sister unconscious and now, I am preparing the oven with the ingredients for my cure. Soon, I will be free!

January 10, 1345 1:45 A.M.

The oven is ready for the final ingredient. Once the boy has been added, all I have to do is recite the spell and the cure will be completed. I will no longer be scrounging the forest floor for scraps and hanging onto life by a thread. Once I'm free, I will be able to reclaim my kingdom and exact the traitorous subjects that led to my downfall, and there is one particular person that I have in mind. Soon that bitch, Zelda, will wish that she had never risen up against me. She will receive a punishment worse than death. Now, it is time to retrieve the boy.

January 10, 1345 2:10 A.M.

...I'm writing in this journal in case anyone finds it, they'll know the ending to this story.

My name is Gretel and I just survived a fight with an evil witch that had tried to throw my brother into an oven for some kind of ritual. I was supposed to have been unconscious after she had taken over Hansel's mind and used him to attack me, but when I fell to the ground, I had pretended to be unconscious so

that the witch would have no reason to shackle me. Then, as she turned to write in her journal, I quietly got up and grabbed the object closest to me, which happened to be a broom, and used it as a weapon. When the witch turned to retrieve Hansel, I struck her with the broom as hard as I could and then pushed her into the furnace that was supposed to be her salvation. As the witch lay in her oven burning to death, a specter materialized from the smoke. The specter took the form of a tall, resolute, and radiant woman. As I stood there in awe, the woman began to speak.

"Hello Gretel, I can't believe you're all grown up. You may not recognize me but I need you to believe me when I tell you this, I am your biological mother. I know that as your mother, it is my job to protect you so I'm so sorry that I failed at this task. It is entirely my fault that you have gone through this terrible ordeal. It is because of my hesitation that this evil being was still alive. I should have known that my spell was not powerful enough to subdue Matilda forever, but it is only right that one of my children complete my work. Thank you Gretel for what you have done. Now because of you a terrible force has been cleansed from this world. I, both as your mother and as Zelda the Honorable, am legitimately proud of you and bestow upon you the powers of a sorceress."

With those words, she was gone, leaving me with a tingly feeling within me. As my consciousness began to fade, all I could remember were the lights of the fire surrounding me. ■

**"The people, unforgettable. The knowledge, helpful. The countless inspirations, priceless."**

— Michael Gyarmathy



# Faith

By PAIGE TREVISANI

Faith meant everything to me. Her glossy, golden locks framed her flawless face in elegant swirls. Her eyes, entombed glass orbs, penetrated deep into my soul, and her pink, bow-shaped lips were permanently arched into a mischievous grin. She was graceful, each stride like a figure skater gliding across a frozen pond. Best of all, she was my big sister, the epitome of my dreams. Anything she did, I imitated. She leapt and I hopped, she floated and I stumbled. She was the painter and I was her apprentice. Faith knew exactly how everything should look, how everything in life should be, and I sought to help her create it.

“Jocelin,” Faith called, her voice a lyrical sonnet, beckoning me from the shore. “Over here!” Falling backwards onto the sand, her lithe figure contorted into shapes, arms outstretched, knees buckled, toes curled.

Entranced by her beauty, my legs propelled me down the hill and I flung myself to the ground beside her. Laughter pulsed from our bellies. Faith’s giggles were laced with mirth. She raised her hand to block out the sun, her fingers producing a kaleidoscope of fragmented light. Turning her head, she gazed at me, with her sparkling silver eyes.

“I wish we could stay like this forever,” she resonated, “just the two of us.”

Everything changed the day Faith died in the school shooting. A man stormed through her divine world’s iron gates and in an instant, she vanished from the earth, as if she never existed. The light inside me blew out. I forgot how to speak. Something deep down in my bones had abandoned me while I stood in the middle of the street, waiting for her to come home from school. I needed her to come back.

I remember my parents sitting me down at the kitchen table. When my father spoke, I could see his mouth moving but no sound came out. I didn’t need to hear it. I saw it on their faces as blatant as words on a page. That was enough. I knew she was gone.

Then, I ran. I climbed onto my bike and sped off in some unknown direction, though, somehow I eventually found myself at the beach. I thought that maybe there was hope. Perhaps she would still be here. She *had* to.

“Faith?” I said, peering into the shadows behind me. But the only reply was the hush of the wind. I waited there until darkness fell and the clouds wiped the stars and moon out of the sky. Faith never came. I just sat there, where Faith had sat, just a moment ago, and wept.

When I came home that evening, I thought I had entered another world. Shattering glass, from my father’s study, made me race to see him smashing picture frames.

At the end of the week, her funeral came. The procession marched desolately through the cemetery, shrouded in gloom with their eerie black cloaks and veils. The tombstones, beacons of death, screamed at me and I shivered. We approached an ominous black hole and I noticed a wooden casket set inside. The minister said a few words about Faith and then began to lower her, gradually, into the abyss, like the mouth of a monster, taunting me and swallowing my sister whole. No one else seemed to notice or care.

“No!” I cried, lunging for her casket. “Make it stop!”

My mother grabbed my arms. “Stay back, Jocelin,” she said, tearing me away from my sister, away from Faith. Tears rolled down my face in rivulets. I turned my head away, not wanting to see her blanketed in darkness. As her remains disappeared from sight, I felt I was being pulled down with her, into the belly of the beast. The monster had won.

I never forgave my mother. For her mistake. For letting Faith go. ■

“This is the first place where I can finally talk to other people about what I’m writing and have them not be bored. This was one of the best experiences of my life.”

— Samuel Pinheiro



# *Fly*

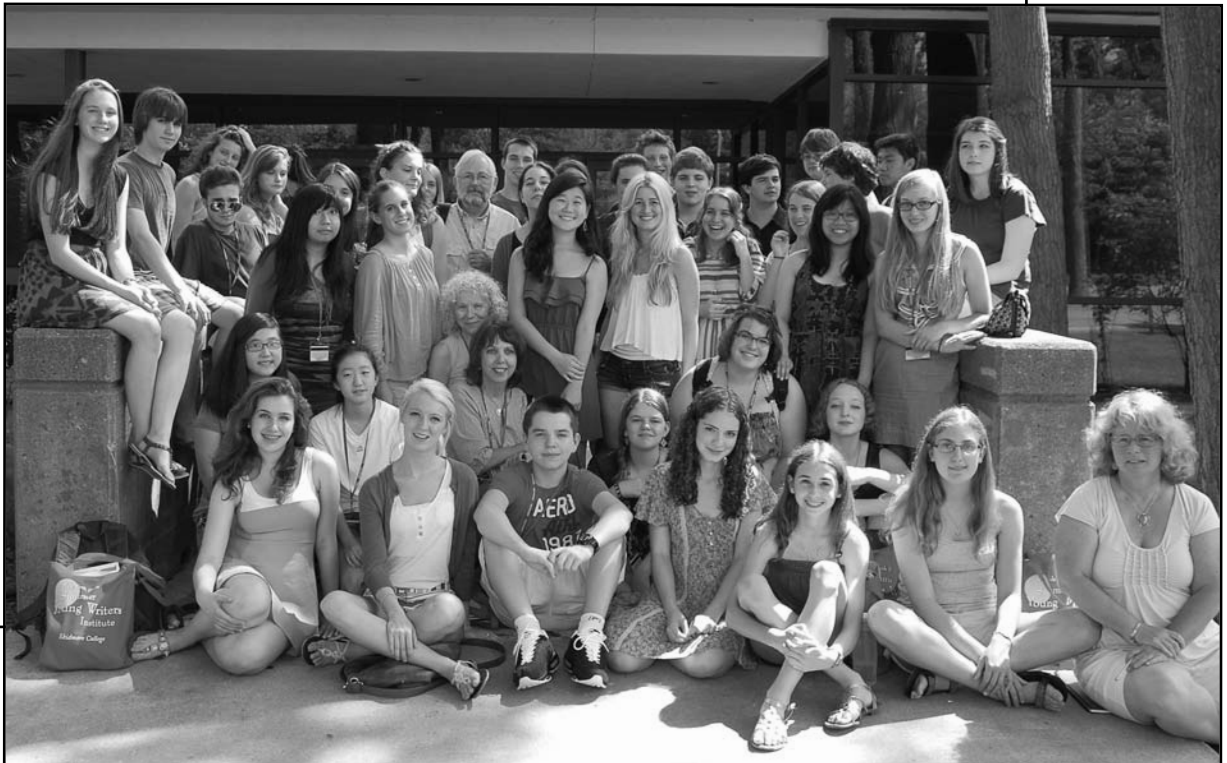
By LYNN WANG

When I am the fly  
With no course, no destination  
Full fat freedom and space  
Why do I want to be the caged bear  
Kept under watch, tied by ropes of steel  
Confined, with no escape

And when I am the caged bear  
Why do I want to be the ox  
Laboring for someone else's fortune  
While the hot sun beats down on me?

And when I am the ox  
Why do I want to be the dying cow  
Isolated and alone, slowly chewing cud

And when I am the dying cow  
When, finally I am the dying cow  
No passion, no soul, left to perish  
Oh, what I would give to be  
The fly.



# New York State Summer Young Writers Institute 2013 Participants

| GROUP A            | GROUP B             |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| MARGARET AKINS     | SARAH BAILEY        |
| EMMA BECKER        | PORSHIA BLANKENSHIP |
| MARISSA BLOCK      | RACHEL BRITTON      |
| TARA CICIC         | JENNA COLUMBIA      |
| CLAIRE DWYER       | ELSA EVANS-KUMMER   |
| ZACHARY EYDENBERG  | CLAIRE FACTOR       |
| ANDREW FEDOROV     | ABIGAIL FREDERICK   |
| JULIA GALASSO      | SHAINA GORMLEY      |
| MADÉLINE GRISARU   | MICHAEL GYARMATHY   |
| MADISON HUGHES     | SAN KIM             |
| DAVID LANE         | NICHOLAS LANGEN     |
| NOAH LA POINTE     | SOFIA LESKO         |
| RACHEL LIM         | REBECCA MARTIN      |
| GRATIS MAXWELL     | CARTER MEYER        |
| JOHANNA MOHRS      | GINA ORLANDI        |
| GLORIA PARK        | SAMUEL PINHEIRO     |
| SOPHIA SCANLON     | RYAN SMITH          |
| ZOË SENISE         | JUSTIN SUNG         |
| JANE SONG          | PAIGE TREVISANI     |
| KRISTIN VON OHLSEN | LYNN WANG           |

“While I would love to write an extensive account, detailing how incredible this place is, the above request asks for brevity. I love this camp. If you’re reading this, apply.”

— Nick Langen

“I loved being able to perform varied types of writing activities. I feel like they made me something of a better writer.”

— Gratis Maxwell



Since its creation in 1984 by the state legislature to promote writing and the artistic imagination across the state, the New York State Writers Institute has become one of the premier sites in the country for presenting the literary arts. Over the course of four decades the Institute has sponsored readings, lectures, panel discussions, symposia, and film events which have featured appearances by more than 1,200 artists—including six Nobel Prize winners, and 90 Pulitzer Prize winners—and has screened more than 700 films, from rare early prints to sneak previews of current releases. The Institute is a major contributor to the educational resources and cultural life at the University at Albany, where it is located, as well as the surrounding community. It is also identified by the writing and publishing communities as a place dedicated to promoting serious literature, where writers and their work are held in high esteem, where being an invited guest is considered an honor, and where talking about books is celebrated as the best conversation in the world.

Further information about Writers Institute programs may be obtained from its website at: [www.albany.edu/writers-inst](http://www.albany.edu/writers-inst).

# SKIDMORE

C O L L E G E

Skidmore is an independent, four-year liberal arts college located about one mile from historic downtown Saratoga Springs, NY. Skidmore extends its academic year emphasis on experimentation and creativity across disciplines into the summer months, through its numerous institutes in the creative and performing arts; the college's Summer Term; programs in the liberal and studio arts for pre-college students; and by promoting a wide array of campus events including concerts, film screenings, lectures, readings, and art exhibits.

# Administrative Staff

**WILLIAM PATRICK**

Director, New York State Summer Young Writers Institute



## New York State Writers Institute

**WILLIAM KENNEDY**

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Director

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Assistant Director

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Program Fellow

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